THE GATES OF WRATH

ARNOLD BENNETT

35 —

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

ANNA OF THE FIVE TOWNS.

'A certain technical interest attaches to the book on account of its fidelity, in many a suggestive touch, to the picturesque craft of the potter . . . The story is never dull. Its own seriousness quickly inspires a reader with a serious interest in the fortunes of the plain people whom it depicts, and to read it is to have a feeling as if one's experience of life had been enlarged.'—SCOTSMAN.

'It is strong both in knowledge at first hand and observation. . . . The author, keeping the interest constantly on the alert, has produced a thoroughly sound, workmanlike novel.'—OUTLOOK. 'A very interesting story.'—DAILY GRAPHIC.

'A powerful story of life in the Potteries. . . . The characters are keenly observed, and the background keeps its place in the picture.'—ACADEMY.

'A finely realised development of character.'—TO-DAY.

'The outstanding merit of the story is its intimate and not unpoetic understanding of the life of the Five Towns. As a whole, the story is a strikingly vivid presentment of life and character in the Potteries; as such it is memorable for its intimacy.'—ACADEMY.

'The characters are wonderfully true to life, and are painted with the hand of a master. I have read every novel of importance that has been published in England for the last ten years, and, of its kind, "Anna of the Five Towns" is certainly the best piece of work since "Esther Waters." One thing may be safely prophesied, "Anna" will be promptly recognised by those critics whose opinion is worth something as the most thoroughly artistic story of the year. . . . A work of which any man might well be proud."—NEW YORK TIMES.

'"Anna of the Five Towns" will sustain Mr. Arnold Bennett's reputation, and in some ways add to it. It is quite a book to read.'—GREENOCK TELEGRAPH.

'There is excellent material in every character, and the grip of circumstance is strong and capable. Indeed, the picture of the "Five Towns," with the life of prosaic labour, into which the mystery of romance yet creeps, is not only admirable but beautiful.'—PILOT. 'A singularly powerful study of life.'—TRUTH.

'Mr. Bennett's description of the revival meetings and the revivalist is vivid and true. . . . The characters are drawn with a firm touch and a true sense of humour. . . . A very able book.'—MORNING POST.

'A powerful and absorbing novel. . . . smartly written.'—STAFFORDSHIRE SENTINEL.

'An admirable and evenly-wrought piece of work; it is a very able study of life among the Potteries; its characterisation is serious and satisfying throughout, and its descriptive passages, always sane and direct, are in parts remarkable for their illuminating minuteness.'—ATHENÆUM.

'To those who do not merely run and read, "Anna of the Five Towns" will be esteemed as a work of great merit. It shows that Mr. Bennett has the nature and the aspirations which, with his manifest capacity for "managing" his creations, make for a foremost place in literature.'—HEARTH AND HOME.

'A stirring, realistic story. . . . The book is good, clever, and boldly written, with an unexpected pathos which is very genuine.'—BOOKMAN.

'The story is artistic in its simplicity, the author's sole object being to show a singular development of incident and character under the influence of wealth.'—MORNING LEADER. 'Admirably told.'—PUNCH.

'The work of a capable and conscientious artist, who has recorded life in the Potteries with unusual insight and fidelity to nature. . . . It is deeply interesting both as a local and general study of human nature. Never have the hideous possibilities of entire discrepancy between profession of Christianity and a man's daily life been more clearly drawn.'—MANCHESTER GUARDIAN.

'A simple story, depending for its interest on character and local colour. . . . Mr. Bennett's men and women live, and we interest ourselves in them as we interest ourselves in the affairs of men and women whom we meet every day. . . . The Dissenting tradespeople who figure as minor characters are admirable.'—WORLD.

'Both Anna and her father are well conceived and admirably depicted, as, indeed, are, without exception, the other characters in the book.'—SKETCH.

'The story is told with restrained and delicate art, and with a realism not devoid of poetry.'—SOUTH WALES DAILY NEWS.

'The heroine is well sketched, and throughout Mr. Bennett excels in accurate portraiture of simple types. The history, "homely and rude," which he relates should delight more than the "few natural hearts" for whose sake, he modestly tells us, he has written it.'—MONTHLY REGISTER.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE GRAND BABYLON HOTEL

'A stirring story . . . most thrilling. . . . The plots and counterplots are described with much force and effect.'—TATLER.

'Mr. Bennett's daring and dexterity have enabled him to produce something that is not only original but enthralling. . . . We shall enjoy another exhibition of Mr Bennett's magic.'—LITERARY WORLD.

'A lively, rattling story, going at such a pace and with such gusto that you are not allowed breathing time. . . . It is well written, and uncommonly readable throughout.' BOOKMAN.

'The book may certainly be recommended. . . . Lively and fresh.'—MORNING POST.

'Wildly exciting. . . . There is hardly an incident, accident, crime, or act of heroism which is not introduced with spirit and effect.'—TRUTH.

'An exciting story, very well told. . . . There are no halting introductory chapters in this realistic story. It starts right away with the first line, just as all, or almost all, really good stories do, or should.'—PELICAN.

'A story full of actuality . . . told with the cunning of a storyteller who knows how to keep his readers' interest alive from the first page to the last.'—TIMES.

'A very amusing story. . . . Excellent is the mingling of farce and characterisation. . . . Vastly amusing and well done; so is the melodrama that follows.'—ACADEMY.

'The ordinary reader may safely be defied to drop it, once he has read the first couple of chapters. . . . From chapter to chapter the reader is hurried along a perfect switchback of sensations, holding his breath all the time, and enjoying it immensely.' MORNING LEADER.

'The best of this week's productions. . . . An amusing mixture of bustling sensations.'—DAILY MAIL.

'Mr. Bennett has shown a brilliant ingenuity in the selection of his material. . . . It is one of the cleverest books of the kind that have been written for some time.' SCOTSMAN.

'Mr. Arnold Bennett has scored a big success. The characters are so boldly drawn, and the plot so logically worked out. . . . A work which is worthy to rank with the best masters of sensational fiction, and which will captivate all lovers of a stupendous mystery admirably worked out.'—BOLTON EVENING NEWS.

'The reader is plunged into one adventure after another, and the book is full of the most startling sensations. Of course it is all pure farce, but it is very good farce, and there is some excellent characterisation besides. . . . Witty and clever, the story cannot fail to please.'—GLASGOW HERALD.

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'It is long since we have read an extravaganza so thoroughly diverting. It suggests an odd compound of "New Arabian Nights," "The Prisoner of Zenda," and "The Mystery of a Hansom Cab." The reader is bound to have a really enjoyable time in following the adventures of the new owner of the "Grand Babylon."'—YORKSHIRE POST.

'For its brightness, vivacity, and sustained interest, is well worth everyone's reading.' STIRLING SENTINEL.

'The interest is so well kept up in "The Grand Babylon Hotel" that one turns page after page and forgets all about the time. . . . There is not a dull line in the book.' NORFOLK CHRONICLE.

'It is a mixture of rather clever fantastic comedy and slapdash melodrama, and the comedy is interesting. . . . There is plenty of incident.'—ATHENÆUM.

'An excellent tale of sensation and mystery. . . . Thrilling.'—DAILY CHRONICLE.

'A wild, fascinating story. . . . The whole reads like a tale out of the "Arabian Nights." It has a fine disregard for all the humdrum possibilities of life, and yet we are not sure it is not true to some kind of life. The book will certainly amuse and interest.' DAILY NEWS.

'Delightfully fresh and original—full of really good stuff. . . . The whole story is one that will be long remembered. It is really out of the common run, and makes me wish to read anything else Mr. Bennett has written. . . . It is really very clever, and the manipulation of the plot very dexterously handled.'—GREENOCK TELEGRAPH.

'A fresh, delightful book.'—DUNDEE EVENING TELEGRAPH.

'A web of plots which are a credit to the invention of Mr. Bennett. . . . He is to be congratulated on producing a first-rate sensational story.'—DAILY TELEGRAPH.

THE GATES OF WRATH

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THE GATES OF WRATH

A MELODRAMA

BY

ARNOLD BENNETT

AUTHOR OF

'THE GRAND BABYLON HOTEL' 'ANNA OF THE FIVE TOWNS'

ETC.

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THE

GATES OF WRATH

PART I

CHAPTER I

THE LOVELY MRS. CAVALOSSI

She sat in her superb private drawing-room at the Hotel Cecil. She was facing the large window which overlooked the Embankment and the Thames and the bridges and the pageant of moving life by road and river. The sun was in the heavens, and summer in the air; the trees of the Embankment Gardens were in full leaf—the geraniums bordering the pathways blazed forth a gorgeous scarlet; the roofs of the fleeting hansoms were brilliant with striped awnings; the large grey excursion steamers heading for Hampton Court carried cargoes of laughter

and white blouses; the water seemed as blue as the sky—all the world was smiling.

Except Mrs. Cavalossi, who was obviously uneasy and annoyed.

Yet she was still young; apparently she had wealth; and her beauty was conspicuous, dazzling, memorable. At the first glance you would have taken her for twenty-five or twenty-six; but on further consideration you would decide, from the firm lines of her mouth, the mystery in the eyes, and her general air of experience, that she might be more. She was, in fact, thirty-four, and she had been a widow for seventeen years. A strange and enigmatic woman, the strangest and most enigmatic thing about her was that during all those years she had remained unmarried. It seemed incredible that she had not sooner or later yielded to the mere constant repetition of proposals which—you would have thought—must have come to a creature of such beauty. Then perhaps you would examine that oval face, neither dark nor fair, but something between the two, with its pearl-shaped hazel eyes, the marvellous profile of the Grecian nose, the exquisite firm mouth, with rich red lips, rather thin and compressed,

the chin a miracle of fine curves, the rounded rose-leaf cheeks unmarred by any cosmetic, the high, clear-white forehead, the little half-hidden ears—you would examine all this, and wonder at it and enjoy it. But you would feel a vague fear; you would be afraid of the deep sinister glance which flashed now and then from those pearl-shaped hazel eyes. You would probably say to yourself that it was a bold man, and a reckless one, who would propose marriage to Mrs. Cavalossi.

She got up suddenly, and passed two or three times to and fro across the room. She was dressed in a walking costume of white drill, with a white hat, under which her brown hair was lightly coiled. Everything was severely simple; yet the last word of style was spoken by that dress and coiffure. She returned to the window, stared—without seeing it—at the magnificent panorama outside, and then abruptly touched an electric button.

A maid, in the traditional black apron, responded to the summons.

'Adela, what time is it, exactly? This clock has stopped.'

'Precisely a quarter to ten, madam.'

'Dr. Colpus has not come?'

'No, madam.'

'Tell Sims'—Mrs. Cavalossi bit her lips—'to go down to the hotel entrance and wait for him and bring him up to me the instant he arrives. Then let me have my gloves and the sunshade that came yesterday from Doucet's. Then go and ask Mrs. Drew to be good enough to stay in her room till I send for her.'

'Yes, madam.'

Adela withdrew.

But the door had scarcely closed behind her before it opened again, and she came in to announce :

'Dr. Colpus.'

The visitor was an erect, slight, active man of advanced middle age. His hair and long moustache were grey. He wore a faultless travelling suit of grey, to match the moustache, and seemed out of breath.

Mrs. Cavalossi advanced to him suavely and shook hands.

'I will ring when I want you,' she said to the maid, and Adela departed. Immediately Mrs. Cavalossi and her visitor were alone the expression of her face changed.

'You said you would arrive at nine,' she said sternly. 'Have you forgotten that in twenty minutes Arthur Forrest will be here?'

'The train was late; it was late in leaving Edinburgh, and it steadily lost ground through the night.'

'The train!' she repeated sarcastically, as if Dr. Colpus should have been above the caprices of railways.

'Yes, the train,' he said, showing his fine teeth in a cool, careless smile. 'Did you expect me to control the Scotch express?'

She made a silencing gesture.

'Well,' she exclaimed impatiently, 'is it all right?'

'It is absolutely all right.'

'You have got the affidavit?'

'Yes.'

'And the marriage and birth certificates?'

'Yes.'

'And you are positively convinced that there can't be any difficulty or mistake of any sort?'

'I was positively convinced six months ago, dear lady; before I went I told you that I regarded this journey as unnecessary. But,

woman-like, you made up your mind—of course, at the last moment—that it must be done; therefore it was done. I am your humble servant, rather hungry and distinctly short of sleep.'

'You are invaluable,' she murmured, and put her white hand on the old man's arm. 'Why, you look as fresh as a boy.' She was smiling now.

'The toilette accommodation on the train was admirable,' he said; 'and, as you know, it is the passion of my life to be a young dandy. By the way, there is a matter I must mention to you. Forrest, you say, will be here in twenty minutes; that gives us twenty minutes to settle it.'

'Settle what?'

'I will tell you. We have arranged that I shall have a hundred thousand if this affair comes off.'

'*If* it comes off?' said Mrs. Cavalossi, with an emphasis of astonishment on the conjunction. '*If* it comes off? Has it not come off?'

'No,' said Dr. Colpus; 'it has not yet come off.'

'You are anticipating, perhaps,' his companion sneered, 'that our young friend may have an apoplectic stroke in the street, or some cheerful accident of that kind?'

'No, indeed; I trust our young friend may enjoy his usual health,' the Doctor smiled and stopped. Then he added, while his face became suddenly hard and grave and sinister: 'Until——'

'Until?'

'I trust our young friend may enjoy his usual health, until——'

The Doctor stopped again. His eyes met those of the beautiful Mrs. Cavalossi in a prolonged stare of profound significance; and it was not the woman's eyes that quailed in that encounter.

'Until he ceases to enjoy his usual health,' said Mrs. Cavalossi imperturbably.

'Exactly,' said Colpus. 'And permit me to add, most precious and adorable creature, that you are the coolest cucumber that it has yet been my privilege to meet.'

'Try not to be silly,' was her only reply. 'Then you agree that the—affair has come off?'

'I agree that it probably will do. But sup-

pose, for the sake of argument, that——' he hesitated.

'Well?' she urged him with a peevishness entirely charming.

'No matter,' he said. 'We will be cheerful and optimistic on this important and beautiful morning. We will assume that success is achieved. We will sing the epithalamium. But before singing the epithalamium of our young friend, I must return to the point from which I started. As I remarked, we have arranged that I shall have a hundred thousand.'

'Yes,' she said.

'I desire to alter that.'

'Alter it, my good Colpus?'

'Precisely. I want five hundred thousand.'

'Five hun——'

They looked at each other in silence for the second time that morning, but now it was a measuring of forces, not a mutual comprehension.

'In other words,' said Dr. Colpus lightly, 'half a million.'

'I am sorry to disappoint you,' Mrs. Cavalossi replied, with a curious glitter in her hazel eyes; 'but really you must admit that a hun-

dred thousand is sufficient—half a million would be preposterous.'

'Yes, dear lady, and I am in a preposterous mood.'

'Half a million,' she went on, as though the antique fop had not spoken, 'is more than you are worth.'

'It would leave you with a round two millions,' said Colpus. 'And after all, I have not been quite indispensable.'

'You are a clever and unscrupulous man,' Mrs. Cavalossi said quietly. 'I will go further and admit that you are an extremely clever and unscrupulous man. But there are several thousands of extremely clever and unscrupulous men in this country, while there is only one woman as beautiful as Sylviane, and not many as beautiful as myself. Far more than a clever and unscrupulous man, this captivating scheme has needed the aid of feminine loveliness, my dear doctor. Therefore——'

'Therefore I must be content with a hundred thousand, eh?'

'Yes; the sum for which you originally stipulated.'

'A lady's logic! Yet I persist in demand-

ing more. The—er—remaining portion of our scheme will fall to my hands, and every day I am more and more impressed by the danger of it.'

'Pooh!' she flouted him. 'You managed well enough the first time.'

'Less was at stake. My brain was cooler, my hand firmer; and the man was older, much older.'

'You aren't growing nervous?' she suggested.

'Do I look nervous? I am merely assessing the danger I run at its true value; and its true value is half a million—neither more nor less.'

Mrs. Cavalossi shook her enchanting head. A shade of anger flitted across the man's face.

'You think I am your adorer,' he said bitterly. 'I am; I have always been, and I shall always be, your adorer. In Hades, whither we are both bound, I shall still adore you. But I am not your blind instrument; I am not the sentimental old fool you take me for, Marie. I say that you shall yield to my demand. I will force you.' His tone was re strained, enigmatic.

'Force me?'

'Yes.'

Her answer was to approach him and put a long, thin, caressing hand on his shoulder.

'Do not speak like that, my friend,' she murmured, after a pause; 'it pains me. You are short of sleep, rather hysterical.'

He laughed the laugh of the conqueror.

'My half-million?' he queried.

She moved away and sat down, and he followed her.

'You shall have it,' she said at length, very quietly.

'You admit that I deserve it?'

'I admit it.'

'Then I kiss your hand.'

And bending, with a grace infinitely elaborate, he did so; it was a fit climax to a mighty transaction. They began to speak of trifles, these two who were playing for millions that had been heaped up by the dead. After all, provided the millions are within grasp, it is as easy to play for a million as for a thousand or a hundred, or for love. A million of money is not so very awe-inspiring when you look it steadily in the face. Ask any millionaire (if

you happen to enjoy the acquaintance of such a person), and if he is truthful he will tell you that the more intimately he becomes acquainted with the length and breadth and the specious magnificence of a million, the less he thinks of it. He will tell you that it falls far short of his youthful dreams of it.

'A lovely day!' exclaimed Mrs. Cavalossi, relapsing into the amiable banality which is a relief even to the greatest minds after a period of stress and strain. They stood together at the window, enjoying the prospect.

'Yes,' Dr. Colpus agreed. 'I saw the dawn from the tail of the Scotch express, and I said to myself: "This will be a perfect day for Sylviane."' He smiled sweetly, and she caught his glance.

'In the matter of the cucumber, to which you referred a few minutes since,' said Mrs. Cavalossi, 'I am proud to yield to you. I may be cool, but you are ice. Look at that cart, by the way; there'll be an accident!'

An ice-cart was lumbering down the Embankment, and the driver had turned the heads of the two great horses towards the side of the road in the direction of a drinking-

trough. According to the invariable custom of London carters, he did not trouble himself to look behind before swerving. On this occasion a hansom-cab happened to be overtaking him on the left. The cabby tried to avoid a collision, but it was too late. The cab-horse charged with full force into the glossy side of the near horse of the ice-cart, and rebounded from that immense bulk as a dog might rebound after aiming at an elephant. The cab-horse staggered against the horse-trough, and a shaft was broken, but no further harm was done. The ruffled cabby descended from his box, evidently emitting quaint and multitudinous oaths, and a young man at the same moment emerged from the interior of the cab, and stepped on to the pavement. With an involuntary movement, Mrs. Cavalossi grasped the hand of Dr. Colpus.

'God!' she whispered, 'it is he!'

'He seems unhurt,' said the excellent doctor.

'He might have been killed—— and then!'

'Yes, my angel,' the Doctor remarked, 'let this be a lesson to you. Not long since you spoke of our affair as accomplished; but

for our inveterate good luck, that clumsy carter might have unconsciously ruined the beautiful edifice that we have erected with so much care.'

The young man out of the hansom was seen to exchange a few words with his cabby. Then he strode forward towards the hotel.

CHAPTER II

SYLVIANE CLOSES HER EYES ONCE

'MR. FORREST,' a servant announced a few minutes later.

Mrs. Cavalossi and Dr. Colpus exchanged an instant's glance, and then the young man who was the pivot of the drama about to be enacted, entered the room. Arthur Forrest was aged about twenty-five, not very tall, and not very firmly built, and with the slightly embarrassed manner often contracted by studious, solitary people. He had the student's face, with possibly a trace of the poet's superadded—grave, inquiring, kindly, and lighting up at moments into a quick smile of appreciation or enthusiasm. Like the doctor, he was dressed for travelling.

'My dear Arthur,' Mrs. Cavalossi exclaimed —and the welcome of her manner seemed to envelop him—'how deeply thankful I am that it was no worse!'

'Good morning,' replied Forrest nonchalantly. 'That what was no worse?'

'I saw your cab accident just now from the window. You had a narrow escape.'

They stood together in the middle of the room. Dr. Colpus remained at the window.

'Oh!' said Forrest lightly, 'that was nothing.'

'You are quite unhurt?'

'Quite. Not even concussion of the brain.'

'Ah! I would say nothing to Sylviane about this.'

'You think it might upset her?'

'Naturally; to-day she is likely to be a little nervous, don't you think?' Mrs. Cavalossi smiled at him—a smile almost maternal.

'No doubt you are right,' Forrest agreed.

As he spoke Adela slipped silently into the room, and handed to her mistress a pair of gloves virginally white.

'You are a few minutes before your time, I fancy, Arthur,' said Mrs. Cavalossi.

'I am a little early,' he answered; 'but on such a morning is it to be wondered at? Where is Sylviane?'

'She will be here in a moment,' said Mrs.

Cavalossi. 'Adela, tell Mrs. Drew that we are ready.'

'Sylviane is well?'

'Did you ever know Sylviane or myself otherwise?' said Mrs. Cavalossi calmly.

'Never,' he said; 'but, then, I have only known you six months.'

'It seems longer,' she said, gently stroking the right-hand glove down her fingers as she coaxed it on.

'To me it is like a dream,' said Arthur Forrest, almost in a whisper, glancing absently at Dr. Colpus, who had remained at the window. 'I can scarcely believe that all this is true—that I am to—— *Is* it true? Am I, a student, with no connections and a total income of four hundred a year, going to——'

'My dear, precious Arthur, how often have I implored you not to talk about money! You are aware that I have enough, more than enough, for Sylviane, for you, and for myself. You know Dr. Colpus, I think; he is an old friend of our family, and he has promised to come with us to-day. Doctor, come forward and instil into Mr. Forrest some of that practical

wisdom for which you are notorious. An occasion like this demands it.'

Dr. Colpus obediently joined the other two.

'I congratulate you, Mr. Forrest,' he said.

'Thanks,' said Arthur.

Then both men simultaneously turned towards the door, which had opened. A young girl stood there—nothing but a young girl, simply dressed in white, framed in the doorway; but the men were held spell-bound, though they had seen her many a time before.

'God!' exclaimed Arthur under his breath, 'she is too beautiful!'

Sylviane stood motionless for a fraction of a second; she was indeed beautiful to a miracle. Astonishingly like Mrs. Cavalossi, in feature and form, she yet totally eclipsed the older woman's beauty. There was in her the unique grace of youth, of eighteen years, the fair fragrance of silken petals unsullied by any breath of time and the world. With a face surpassing the perfection of carved marble, and a body slim, lithe, yielding in slight curves to every emotion which passed through her, she looked what she was—the incarnation of

supreme loveliness—a loveliness which was always revealing itself anew.

Arthur sprang forward as she came into the room.

'May I?' he murmured.

Her smile responded; he kissed her.

Mrs. Cavalossi and Dr. Colpus exhibited an amiable toleration of this episode.

'Is it time?' asked Sylviane, after she had shaken hands with the Doctor. Her voice was low, tremulous, sweet. Arthur marvelled at it anew, as he had marvelled a thousand times before.

'Nearly. We may as well go,' said Mrs. Cavalossi.

'The irrevocable is best done quickly,' remarked Dr. Colpus impassively. Mrs. Cavalossi caught his eye as he spoke. She was putting on the left-hand glove; her fingers violently clenched. Glancing scornfully at the speaker, she pressed the electric bell.

'Adela,' she said, 'another pair of gloves; these have split. Quick, we are starting.'

'But my breakfast,' put in the Doctor.

'You have not breakfasted? But why?' This from Forrest.

'I—I am not good at getting up early.'

'Very sorry, Doctor,' said Mrs. Cavalossi lightly; 'but since you rose late your breakfast must be late. Now, young people.'

Going down to the ground floor in the lift she chattered gaily.

'I am in charge of this exciting expedition,' she said, as they went out; 'all must obey me.'

A carriage and pair was waiting at the entrance to the hotel, and with the assistance of some half-dozen gentlemen in gilded uniform they ensconced themselves therein.

'You have that precious blue paper, Arthur?' Mrs. Cavalossi leaned towards him. He gave an affirmative. She nodded a command to the footman, and they drove off westward, down the Strand, and so into a little side street by Charing Cross. The carriage stopped before a shabby, dirty building with a brass plate on the door. They entered. Another group of four was just coming out.

'Is this really the place?' asked Sylviane in the passage, eyeing askance two girls with purple feathers in their hats, one of whom was gently weeping.

'Name,' demanded a clerk, who popped out from a room.

'Forrest,' said Arthur.

The clerk consulted a paper. 'Arthur Forrest and Sylviane Drew?'

'Yes.'

'This way. You're early; but never mind,' said the clerk cheerfully.

All four went into a room at the back, furnished like an office. In this room two officials were seated at a desk. The clerk gave information to his superiors.

'Let the contracting parties step forward. Have you the licence, Mr.—er—Forrest? Thanks.'

The two officials scrutinised the document produced.

'There is surely a mistake here,' one of them said; 'Sylviane Drew is described as a widow.'

The man looked with involuntary admiration at the young girl as she stood before him, flushed and a little nervous.

Dr. Colpus sprang up and beckoned the official aside.

'It is quite right,' he whispered; 'Mrs.

Drew is a widow. She was previously married at the age of sixteen. A dreadful tragedy—— If possible please do not refer to the matter.'

The official waved a hand; he had been a superintendent registrar of marriages for twenty years, and allowed nothing to startle him.

In another minute Arthur Clinton Forrest and Sylviane Drew were man and wife.

'Witnesses, please to sign,' the clerk intoned perfunctorily.

Dr. Colpus and Mrs. Cavalossi went to the desk.

'Related to the bride or bridegroom?' asked the minor registrar.

'No,' said Dr. Colpus.

'Related to the bride or bridegroom?' the official repeated mechanically.

'I am the bride's mother,' said Mrs. Cavalossi.

'The bride's—I beg pardon; what did you say?'

'I am the bride's mother.'

'Sign here, please,' was the laconic response. But both registrars looked intently at the radiant lady; it was, indeed, a day of surprises

for them. Later on, when they were alone, they actually discussed the beauty of the two women, so incredibly mother and daughter, who had invaded their office that morning.

'Is it all over?' asked Mrs. Cavalossi.

'Quite over,' said Dr. Colpus; and the husband and wife laughed, not without embarrassment.

'And I have not had to give a single order!' said Mrs. Cavalossi. 'Let us return.'

'My breakfast,' said the Doctor, genially, pretending to smack his lips.

They drove back to the hotel, and the breakfast, served in the dining-room of Mrs. Cavalossi's private suite, was at least as elaborate and satisfying as Dr. Colpus had a right to expect; he did, indeed, several times audibly pronounce it to be so. Arthur and Sylviane had little to say; but Mrs. Cavalossi and the Doctor vied with each other in the sprightliness and gaiety of their conversation. The meal passed with the rapidity of a dream.

'I drink to the health of Mr. and Mrs. Forrest!' said the Doctor uprising, glass in hand.

'No speeches,' exclaimed Mrs. Cavalossi.

'So far, at my special desire, this wedding has been strictly informal, and I wish the informality to continue.'

'Dear lady, you desolate me. I have been composing that speech for the last twenty minutes; and now I am forbidden to give it vent!'

Suavely smiling, he clinked glasses with husband and wife.

Arthur said, 'On behalf of my wife and myself, I thank you heartily, Doctor;' and then the breakfast was over.

'What time does the train leave Charing Cross?' Sylviane asked her husband.

'Twelve forty,' said Mrs. Cavalossi before Arthur could reply. 'You must leave us in thirty minutes. Perhaps you had better go and prepare, Sylviane. I have something to say to Arthur; he and I and the Doctor will go into the drawing-room.'

'Yes, mamma,' answered Sylviane, and disappeared.

'Now, Arthur,' began Mrs. Cavalossi, when they had crossed the corridor into the drawing-room. She held up a finger playfully.

'Yes, *maman*,' he replied, following her

lead, and meekly folding his hands behind him. 'What are the maternal counsels?'

'You are a married man, Arthur.'

'I suppose I am; but it seems too good to be true.'

'You think so?' she queried; and Arthur saw her eyes flash. Instead of speaking he nodded.

'You will soon find it is true enough,' she laughed.

'What do you mean?' he said.

'Marriage is very commonplace.'

'Mine will not be.'

Her eyes flashed again.

'Perhaps you are right,' she said. 'But let me come to my points. You know all about the great tragedy of Sylviane's life—she was only sixteen when it happened. She seems to have forgotten it, but that can never be. Watch over her, Arthur. I know that all mothers say this to their sons-in-law, but you are aware that in this case there is a special reason.'

'Yes, yes,' he said eagerly; 'you may rely on me, *maman*.'

'I know I can, Arthur. Still, there is no harm in reminding you that although you have

married a widow, you have also married a young and susceptible girl. And now, my second point.'

'I attend.'

'You must make your will.'

'Now?'

'Certainly; this is the proper time. It is your duty. Who knows what may happen?'

'Ay!' put in the Doctor, sententiously.

'A settlement was out of the question,' pursued Mrs. Cavalossi; 'I knew that, and I was content. You were commendably frank about your position when you asked me for Sylviane, Arthur; nevertheless, you should make a will in favour of your wife.'

'I shall be delighted,' said Arthur. 'I have an annuity of four hundred a year, which, of course, ceases at my death. Shall I bequeath that to Sylviane?'

She raised a hand as though in plaintive feminine appeal.

'Don't make fun of your poor mother-in-law. You might possess property later on; it is even conceivable that you might earn something,' she smiled, 'though I fancy your profession of art criticism is not an excitingly remunerative one.'

'True,' said Arthur, sticking his lips grimly together. 'But I will leave to Sylviane all that I have or ever shall have.'

'That is what I want—here is a pen; there isn't much time.'

'What do I write?' said he, sitting down with due solemnity.

'Write as I dictate,' said Dr. Colpus, looking suddenly at Mrs. Cavalossi. 'I have witnessed many wills, and I know the form well. Are you ready?'

'Ready,' said Arthur, with poised pen.

'*This is the last will of me, Arthur Clinton Forrest. I bequeath all my property of whatsoever nature to my wife, Sylviane. Dated this 20th day of June*, 189—.'

'Is that all?' the testator inquired, rather surprised.

'That is all,' said the Doctor, 'except the witnessing, which is rather important; Mrs. Cavalossi and I will attend to that. Sign it first, please.'

It appeared as if Dr. Colpus had taken charge of the proceedings.

'Listen, Sylviane,' Arthur called out from the table a moment afterwards, when his

beautiful wife entered the room, ready for departure. 'Listen to my will. "*I, Arthur Clinton Forrest, bequeath all my property of whatsoever nature to my wife, Sylviane.*" So that, if I die to-morrow——'

He stopped in alarm, suddenly realising what he had done.

The girl had sunk back into a chair with an inarticulate cry.

'Arthur, how could you?' whispered Mrs. Cavalossi.

'Do you forget that poor Drew died the day after they were married?' said Dr. Colpus, with curious calm.

'Sylviane! forgive me!' Arthur exclaimed, and took her in his arms. In a moment or so the incident was over, and Sylviane had perfectly recovered her composure.

'How stupid of me!' she said, smiling. Nevertheless there was a certain chill gloom as the pair began to make their farewells, and not all Dr. Colpus's professional *aplomb* could disperse it. Arthur regarded the thing, in spite of himself, as an omen of evil.

'Good-bye, Sylviane, good-bye,' said Mrs

Cavalossi, kissing her daughter twice on the cheek. 'Good-bye, Arthur. Be very happy; and write soon, both of you—recollect that I shall be lonely.'

'Good-bye!'

'Good-bye and good luck!' Dr. Colpus was shaking hands and bowing with wonderful industry.

'Sylviane!' Mrs. Cavalossi called her daughter aside. 'One word'—she bent to whisper in the girl's ear; 'you will receive the letter at Montreux. I may send Sims with it; one must be dramatic. You understand?'

For answer the girl closed her eyes once.

Then husband and wife were gone; the honeymoon had commenced.

'I carried it through nicely, didn't I?' said Mrs. Cavalossi subsequently to Dr. Colpus.

'The affair was arranged perfectly,' answered the Doctor. 'Shall I take charge of the young man's will?'

'I won't trouble you, thanks all the same,' said Mrs. Cavalossi; 'I can keep it safe.'

'Why did you marry them in a registry office?' asked the Doctor.

'Oh! I hardly know,' said Mrs. Cavalossi. 'I suppose I had reasons.'

'You were always sentimental,' Dr. Colpus rallied her.

'I think you will find, my good friend,' she retorted, 'that I am sentimental only in matters of sentiment.'

'Then you regard this marriage as a matter of sentiment?'

'I regard the particular form of its celebration as a matter of sentiment.'

'Yes,' he agreed, courteously hiding a yawn, 'all women are alike in this. It is a curious thing—the psychology of the feminine mind!'

'You are not a woman. You have never been married; therefore you cannot understand. I did not care to see my daughter married in a church; it would not have been decent. You have no sense of the proprieties.'

'The lamented Mr. Drew married your daughter in a church.'

'Yes; but I regret it.'

'A wedding——' began the Doctor.

'My dear and excellent Colpus,' Mrs. Cavalossi interrupted him, 'why will you harp on the subject?'

'Cannot you guess?' he said.

'No—since the affair is over.'

'I will tell you, then.' He cleared his throat, stood up, and walked about the room. 'Have you not noticed, Marie, that one wedding often begets another?'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean,' he continued, 'that the sight of Mr. Forrest's connubial bliss makes me envious of that unexceptionable bridegroom.'

'Well?'

'Marie, let me entreat you to be sentimental. Marry me—I love you, for your beauty and for your sins. Have I not worshipped long enough at the outer shrine, unrewarded?'

'It was because you loved me, I suppose,' she remarked with satiric emphasis, 'that you haggled with me this morning like a very Jew?'

'My dear girl, one does not haggle over half a million. One haggles over half a crown; but where half a million is concerned we call it negotiation. Besides, I only haggled in order to prove to myself that——'

'What?'

'That I could twist you round my little

finger ;' he held up that appendage and shook it at her.

'You flatter yourself, my Colpus ; no man could ever influence me.'

'I can, simply because you love me. You have loved me since you were sixteen, Marie, since I first met you in Berlin at the house of that pompous ambassador to whose children you were governess. I was poor then—I am not very rich now.'

'But you expect to be rich shortly,' she put in, caustically.

'I was poor then,' he resumed, with a hint of seriousness. 'And it was really very chivalrous and unselfish of me to assist in your marriage with the second secretary of the Italian legation. Truly, I don't know why I did it ; in those days I must have been a perfect saint. I might just as well have married you myself.'

'And doomed us both to a life of poverty,' she added.

'We should soon have acquired riches, you and I,' he said.

'In those days'—she looked at him firmly —'I had not learnt to be unscrupulous.'

He hummed a fragment of an air, and then said lightly: 'You have never told me, by the way, the circumstances of Signor Cavalossi's death.'

'My husband died of failure of the heart's action,' she replied, in a low voice.

'H'm! Every one does,' he commented; and then went on, as though to dismiss a too delicate subject: 'What a pity I lost sight of you for twelve years! we might have achieved so much in that time—— Had I but known you were a widow!'

She gazed at the window in thought. 'We met soon enough,' she said, reflectively; 'you are my evil genius.'

'Yes,' he said, 'and there is only one way of exorcising me—by marriage. Be serious, Marie; be sentimental, be kind—be mine!' His mild voice rose in a discreet crescendo of appeal.

'Am I not yours in soul, if not in body?' she murmured.

'I love you,' he said; 'you know it.' He bent his face towards hers.

'As for me, I hate you!' Her eyes were lifted to his, he saw that they were full of

tears. 'Once, perhaps, I loved you, but now I hate you; and, to save my soul from perdition, I would not marry you.'

Never before had he seen the least trace of moisture in the pearl-shaped orbs of Mrs. Cavalossi. He stopped at the sight of them, as one stops who comes suddenly to the edge of a precipice.

'That is my misfortune,' he answered her, in a grave, conciliatory tone; 'my misfortune, not my fault. Dutiful as ever, I submit to remaining in the outer shrine.' And, kissing his hand, he walked out of the room.

As soon as he had departed Mrs. Cavalossi rang the bell for her maid.

'Adela,' she said, 'we leave here to-morrow.'

'Yes, madam.'

'Send Sims to me in half an hour.'

'Yes, madam.'

'And get me a liqueur of cognac and my Russian cigarettes.'

'Yes, madam.'

As she lighted a cigarette Mrs. Cavalossi remarked to the match, 'He is right, and he knows it. I am madly in love with him, and I would give a million not to be so.'

CHAPTER III

THE ARRIVAL OF MR. SIMS

Arthur Forrest and his wife had been married three weeks. After a tour in the Austrian Alps they had gone on to the Hôtel Splendide at Montreux, in order to enjoy for a day or two the charms of the Lake of Geneva. It was a cloudless July morning. Arthur had just finished an English breakfast, and he was possessed by that profound feeling of satisfaction which only an English breakfast can produce. Sylviane had left the table, and was reclining in an easy chair. She complained of fatigue; they had spent most of the previous day in a rather complicated railway journey. As she sat there, languidly smiling, enveloped in a confection of blue silk and white chiffon, her exquisite face showing the flushed pallor of a wild rose, Arthur examined her with a gaze so searching, so intent, that she moved uneasily under it.

'What is the matter?' she said.

'Nothing whatever, dearest; but if your face is within sight I must look at it.'

The first part of this statement was not entirely truthful. Something was the matter, but that something was so slight, so elusive, that Arthur was almost justified in calling it nothing. The fact was that, though Arthur loved his marvellous wife deeply, he was, so to say, mystified by her; her temperament was a labyrinth in which his soul lost itself. He reflected that this had been so since his first meeting with her six months ago. That meeting had occurred, curiously enough, at the house of a high official of the British Museum, a scholar with whom Arthur was on friendly terms, and whom he was in the habit of visiting. At an 'At Home' given by that gentleman Mrs. Cavalossi and her daughter had been present, and Arthur, not unnaturally, was fascinated at once. Impelled by a sudden passion of admiration, he, who had hitherto considered women as being outside his sphere, had audaciously requested permission of these two ladies to call on them, and the permission had been granted with a welcoming graciousness which

positively astonished him. Mrs. Cavalossi had told him that they were staying at the Hotel Cecil for the season, that they travelled about a great deal, had no settled home, and very few friends. Subsequently Arthur inquired from his friend of the British Museum how he, whose instincts were not remarkably social, had come to number this wonderful mother and daughter among his friends. The official said that he did not number them among his friends, that they had been invited by his wife, who had met them at a dance at the Hotel Cecil. Arthur found that his friend had not even noticed anything extraordinary about Mrs. Cavalossi and Sylviane. He attributed this to the man's notorious absorption in Egyptian sculpture, upon which subject he happened to be the greatest authority in the world.

The acquaintance thus begun had grown at a rapid pace. Arthur found the two ladies installed in one of the luxurious suites of the great hotel on the Embankment. Obviously their means were so large as to be practically unlimited; they had a retinue of their own servants, who lived in the hotel. Arthur was by no means a gastronomical expert, but he

felt sure that their *cuisine*, apparently simple, and their wines, never more than one at a meal, were absolutely of the unsurpassable first grade. Nevertheless, the pair were of quiet tastes. Apparently they did not go out much, and there was never the slightest ostentation. It came to pass that Arthur got into a habit of dining with them *tête-à-tête*. Sometimes they would go to the theatre together. Soon the young man was upon terms of intimacy. He never attempted to disguise his sentiments towards Sylviane—disguise would have been foreign to his nature; and since both Mrs. Cavalossi and Sylviane herself encouraged, rather than restrained, his candour in this respect, he placed no bridle upon his galloping passion. He had dared to fall in love with the loveliest woman he had ever seen—a creature surrounded by all the graces of environment which wealth can bestow—and certainly so far his love had not been scorned. It seemed incredible, but since the fact stared him in the face, he accepted it—and went on.

One night he took an opportunity to tell Mrs. Cavalossi that he was a poor man of no particular family, who had done nothing all his

life but travel through Europe seeing pictures and writing about them, and that his highest ambition was to write a monumental work on the art galleries of Europe. Mrs. Cavalossi had calmly given him to understand that, as for her, though she had wealth, she attached no real importance to either wealth or birth.

Within the next week Arthur had proposed to Sylviane and been accepted.

The whole thing was like a dream to him, some vision from which one wakes to the hard reality of prosaic life. But he had not bothered about any possible waking; he had ceased to be interested in anything save Sylviane. The young girl, with the tragic history of her first marriage behind her, passionately attracted him as an enigma at once bewildering and delicious. The succession of her moods was infinitely various. At one moment she would be the very incarnation of some early-Tennysonian heroine; it was then that he could peer into the recesses of her soul and divine the secret therein. At the next all was changed; her eye hardened, she would utter some cynical commonplace in her mother's manner, and Arthur withdrew, as it were, baffled. And yet even

at these instants he felt that there was something else behind and beneath the assumption of mere worldliness.

He abandoned the puzzle, contenting himself with the sweet certainty of his love. Then he would take it up once more, and abandon it again. Finally, he had said to himself that when they were married her spirit would bare itself to his, and this mysterious veil hanging between them be rent for ever.

The veil, however, had not been rent. He loved her, his love daily increased; but she was a riddle to him, adorable, unique, intoxicating—but a riddle. It was the consciousness of this that slightly disturbed him as he gazed at her that morning in the hotel at Montreux.

Presently she went to the window and looked out.

'Do come and look, Arthur,' she said, with a sigh of pleasure. He went to her side.

The immense lake, an ocean of rippling blue, lay extended at their feet, tremulous in the clear sunshine. The sky had no cloud. Far away was an indistinct line topped here and there with glittering white patches—the snow-capped Alps. A few coloured sails moved

slowly across the water, and almost as slowly the great lake-birds circled to and fro past the hotel windows asking to be fed. It was a scene that would have made a brewer sentimental or a stockbroker write poetry. Sylviane yielded herself to its influence. She never talked much, and she did not talk now. She turned her amazing eyes upon Arthur, and took his hand.

Together they went out on to the balcony. Down below people were walking about.

'Why,' she cried suddenly, 'there is Sims, of all folks in the world.' She dropped Arthur's hand; all was changed.

'Sims?' said Arthur.

'Yes, you know,' she answered impatiently, 'my mother's invaluable courier. He is coming here; something has happened.'

'I hope nothing is wrong.'

'Wrong! Of course not. It is one of mamma's whims, I know perfectly well. I shouldn't be at all surprised if she had sent from London just to inquire after our healths. You don't know mamma, Arthur; she is capable of being very extraordinary.' The girl's voice was strangely hard.

'If she has sent Sims merely to say "How are you?" to us, she certainly is,' agreed Arthur. 'Shall we go downstairs and meet the man?'

'Let us stay here; he will be knocking at our door in a moment, you will see,' said Sylviane; 'Sims never loses time.'

Sylviane was right. Sims, having ascertained their number, without an instant's delay was upon them. He knocked and entered, and with a gentle, low 'Good morning, madam; good morning, sir,' presented a letter to Sylviane. Sims was dressed in navy blue, with a black necktie; he looked the perfection of calmness and sinister discretion.

'You have come direct from Mrs. Cavalossi?' Arthur asked him, amused at the man's air of having done nothing but what was entirely usual.

'Yes, sir.'

'Travelled fast?'

'Moderately, sir.'

'Is Mrs. Cavalossi quite well?'

'My mistress enjoys her accustomed health, sir.'

Sylviane finished the letter with a smile.

The answer is "Yes," Sims.'

'I thank you, madam. Good morning.'

Sims was gone.

'Well,' laughed Arthur; 'of all the quaint——'

'Listen,' said Sylviane, interrupting him. It *is* rather startling after all. This is what mamma says:—

'"My dear Sylviane and Arthur,—Just a line to say that I have the most wonderful piece of news to communicate to you—it is so wonderful that I can't write it; I simply must tell it. I am going to Folkestone to-day, and shall stay at the Metropole. Will you oblige me by coming home *via* Boulogne instead of Calais, and we can see each other at Folkestone? I long to see you both; I long to tell you this wonderful news, which, by the way, concerns Arthur very intimately. I may just say that it was Dr. Colpus who found it out, quite by accident. In five days you will be at Folkestone, will you not? Till then, *au revoir*, and my fondest love.—M. C."'

'Concerns me intimately, does it?' said Arthur.

Sylviane smiled at him through half-closed eyes.

'Do you guess what it is?' he asked her, surmising something from her glance.

'Not a bit. By the way, I gave Sims his answer without consulting you; do you mind, dearest? It was very wrong of me.'

She pretended to be contrite. He came over and kissed her; one excuse serves as well as another on a honeymoon.

'I am dying to know what it can be,' Sylviane murmured. 'You may be sure that if mamma says it's wonderful, it *is* wonderful.'

'You are right,' said Arthur.

'Mamma never exaggerates.'

'Where is the letter dated from?' asked Arthur suddenly; and they examined the missive, their two heads dangerously close together. But there was no sign of the place of the letter's origin.

'Mamma said she should leave the Cecil the day after we did,' Sylviane remarked; 'and I thought she was going straight to Folkestone. But here she says, "I am going to Folkestone to-day."'

'Let's ask Sims where he came from.'

'You forget; Sims has gone. By this

time he will be halfway across Europe *en route* for home.'

'So he will, my acute darling.' The fond youth stroked her wondrous hair.

'I'm sure of one thing — that mamma wouldn't stay in London all this time by herself. She'd be so dull.'

'With Dr. Colpus?' Arthur suggested with a malicious laugh.

'What do you mean, my love?

'Dr. Colpus is never dull, is he?'

'Do you think, then, that there is anything between mamma and Dr. Colpus?'

'I never meditate on such matters, Sylviane; but it struck me that the Doctor enjoyed the occupation of being a satellite to your mother.'

'Dr. Colpus is nothing to mamma. He is a wicked man.'

'Quite possibly, my dearest; but how do you know?'

'I—I—I feel it,' said Sylviane, blushing momentarily.

And once more Arthur experienced the curious sensation of being baffled by something in his wife's personality which he could not fathom.

'You actually know nothing against him, then,' Arthur persisted.

Sylviane kissed her spouse full on the lips; it was the first time during their honeymoon that she had offered him a caress unasked. He thanked her as a lover should, and with that forgetfulness of all external things which should invariably characterise the demeanour of a lover.

'Let us talk of something else,' Sylviane appealed to him gently. 'We have not come to Montreux to discuss Dr. Colpus.'

And she ran to the window, he following.

'The lake is lovely,' said Arthur.

'Suppose we go for a sail,' she replied, taking his hand, and glancing into his eyes with a girlish timidity that sent him wild with ecstasy.

In a quarter of an hour they were afloat on the sunlit blue, and Dr. Colpus passed into oblivion.

Yet it seemed as if Sylviane could not forget her mother's letter, and since Dr. Colpus's name occupied an important position in the letter, that name crept again into their conversation. As thus :

'Now, what *can* mamma's news be?' Sylviane burst out without any warning or prelude.

Arthur examined her face.

'Suppose we wire privately to Dr. Colpus and ask him. Your mother says it was he who found out this wonderful thing.'

'Only by accident, though,' said Sylviane.

'Does Dr. Colpus ever do anything by accident?' Arthur asked the surrounding air.

The light went out of Sylviane's eyes.

'I believe you know what the news is,' Arthur went on. 'I believe you're only teasing me.'

'Arthur!'

'You look awfully self-conscious, you kitten.'

He smiled fondly at her, but she burst into tears, and he had to comfort her.

On the next day but one they were in Paris, and on the fifth day after receiving the letter they had reached Boulogne. The sea was a little rough, and Sylviane regarded the tiny tossing Boulogne paddle-boat with apprehension.

'Let us wait till to-morrow,' Arthur suggested, as they stood on the quay.

'But mamma is expecting us.'

'What matter? Mamma can wait.'

Sylviane looked out to sea.

'I should prefer to go to-day,' she said; 'let me get it over.'

Immediately they went on board, Sylviane insisted on disappearing into the ladies' cabin. To Arthur's argument that she would be better on deck she was inflexibly adamant.

Arthur walked from end to end of the ship during the whole voyage. As the cliffs of England grew visible to the eye, his mind became engaged upon Mrs. Cavalossi's message. Sylviane had mentioned it several times on the intervening days. Her demeanour in the matter puzzled him. She insisted that the message must refer to something of the highest importance, something which meant good fortune, and yet her curiosity seemed to be listless and half-hearted. His own speculations on the question did not lead him far. They pointed in only one direction, and that direction, he felt convinced, was quite impossible.

As he stood at the prow of the boat a hand was suddenly laid on his shoulder from behind.

'Hullo, Arthur! What are you doing here?'

He turned round, and beheld a young man of about twenty-five, with a round, smooth, boyish face, and a distinctly boyish laugh.

'Hullo!' Arthur returned the salutation. They shook hands with energy.

'What have you been up to?' asked the boy of twenty-five.

'Only getting married,' Arthur replied; and they fell at once into an intimate conversation.

'Who,' inquired the youth, 'has been blind enough to your defects to marry you?'

Arthur laughed, as one is bound to laugh at the tedious pleasantries of one's intimate friends.

'A lady,' he said.

'A widow, I bet,' said the youth.

'You are right, my dear fellow,' said Arthur seriously.

'No! Not really!' It was the youth's turn to feel embarrassed. 'Young, I am sure,' he said gallantly.

'You are right again; she is eighteen.'

'Eighteen and a widow! You are joking, Arthur.'

'My sagacious infant, I have not yet been married long enough to have learnt how to

make jokes at the expense of my wife. She was first married at the age of sixteen—she was a wife for one day only; the poor chap died. Does that satisfy you?'

'Perfectly. I was always rude, you know, without meaning to be. And may I ask, without offence, if this is part of your honeymoon?'

'It is the last day of our honeymoon.' As he uttered the words, Arthur involuntarily sighed.

'How's art-criticism getting on?' inquired the youth.

'I have forgotten all about it; I have forgotten that such a thing as a picture exists. By the way, you omitted to congratulate me on my marriage.'

'Did I? I apologise. Accept my congratulations, and don't think I am not delighted to hear your news. The truth is, I'm a bit preoccupied with my own affairs. I am conscious of a certain desire to talk about myself, and in trying to restrain that desire I forget the subject in hand.'

'My dear chap, talk about yourself by all means. You always did when you were with me; don t lose your old habits.'

The boy of twenty-five gazed out to sea for a few moments.

'I say,' he said at length, 'my birthday will be here in a trifle over two months.'

'I congratulate you,' said Arthur. 'I knew it couldn't be long now before you came into *it*.'

The boy laughed eagerly.

'I come into *it* on the 20th of September precisely. I can scarcely believe the thing, you know. But I've made up my mind I'm going to have a terrific big show to celebrate it. I shall want you and Mrs. Forrest to come down to Staffordshire early in October. You'll come?'

'We'll come, if it's only to see what sort of an ass you make of yourself.' Arthur looked thoughtfully at the harbour, which they were now entering. 'Yes,' he repeated, 'we'll decidedly come; it will enchant Sylviane.'

'Sylviane: is that your wife? What a beautiful name! If Mrs. Forrest is as beautiful as her name——'

'She is seventy and seven times more beautiful, old chap, but——'

'But——'

'Well, to be candid, which always means to be rude, if she has experienced any—er—unpleasantness on the voyage she won't want me to be introducing you to her immediately we land; so you'd better clear off. See? You say you're staying the night in Folkestone. So are we; we shall be at the Metropole. Call in the morning. Where are you staying?'

'Not at the Metropole—can't afford; run dry.'

Arthur laughed loudly.

'I'll lend you a tenner,' said he.

'Oh, no, you won't,' said the boy.

'Then all this time you've kept strictly within the allowance? No borrowing?'

'Strictly,' said the boy, not concealing his pride in the statement.

'I renew my congratulations. You are a prodigy.'

'But won't I have a time in the autumn!' was the emphatic response.

The boat drew alongside. They shook hands, with a 'See you to-morrow,' and Arthur went below to seek the woman who was seventy and seven times more beautiful than her name.

CHAPTER IV

ARTHUR'S SURPRISE FALLS BELOW EXPECTATIONS

'And now, mamma,' said Sylviane, 'let us hear this wonderful news.' Arthur and Sylviane, with Mrs. Cavalossi and Dr. Colpus, were just finishing dinner in a private room of the Hotel Metropole at Folkestone. It was Mrs. Cavalossi's custom to inhabit the private rooms of expensive hotels. She told Arthur that she adored hotels, that all the events of her somewhat eventful life had occurred in hotels, and that it was her full intention to die in an hotel. She averred that though hotels were expensive, they saved trouble; that if you went the right way to work you could always get exactly what you wanted, and that therefore to patronise hotels was in the end, for a person of means, the cheapest way of keeping a roof over your head.

Dr. Colpus had arrived from London—after the soup, smiling, *débonnaire*, and imperturbable

as usual. Sylviane was perfectly recovered from the inconveniences of the Channel, and she and her mother were gay, alert, radiant, entrancing. By chance their dresses were almost exactly similar—of grey silk with an alluring V-shaped corsage. They looked like sisters, and they knew it, and consciously or unconsciously accentuated the fact by little resemblances of speech and gesture. Arthur sat between them, with Dr. Colpus opposite. The extraordinariness of their amazing beauty had never struck him more impressively than to-night. Yet amid this scene of light laughter and feminine loveliness, in this room where softly shaded candles threw a discreet light upon half-empty glasses and exquisite feminine arms, he experienced a sense of diffidence, even of apprehension. He felt that he had slipped out of his world—the world of scholarship and art and simplicity.

With an abrupt motion of the hand, Mrs. Cavalossi dismissed the waiter. Then, raising her glass, she said:

'I drink to the news!'

'To the news!' repeated Dr. Colpus and Sylviane.

'I call upon Dr. Colpus to deliver it,' continued Mrs. Cavalossi.

'Oh, then, it is Dr. Colpus's news?' said Arthur.

'Dr. Colpus will relate it. For myself, I couldn't possibly remember all the details; it is much too complicated,' said Mrs. Cavalossi. 'Moreover, the credit of the discovery belongs entirely to our dear Doctor. Thirdly and lastly, at my special request he has very kindly come down specially from London to-night to meet us.'

The Doctor bowed.

'The whole business is very extraordinary,' he began, 'so extraordinary as to be almost incredible. I haven't ceased to wonder at it from the moment when I first started to unravel the thing.'

'When was that?' asked Arthur.

'Curiously enough, it was on the very afternoon of your marriage. I was idling about in the reading-room at the Cecil, when I picked up a back number of the *Graphic*—it was three years old. I was just about to ask the attendant how it came there, when my eye caught a portrait of Carl Peterson.'

Arthur was sipping his champagne. He quietly put down his glass, and, drumming with his knuckles on the table, put in :

'You mean Peterson the Staffordshire millionaire?'

'Precisely,' said the Doctor. 'You may remember he died about a couple of years ago. He left a fortune of two millions and three-quarters.'

'Heavens!' ejaculated Mrs. Cavalossi, smiling brilliantly, 'I feel like a pauper.'

'Yes,' Dr. Colpus repeated, 'two millions and three-quarters. The fortune was so large that the newspapers printed his will in full. Not that it was a long document. He had two sons ; one of them, Carl, the younger, was insane ; some say it was owing to an unfortunate accident to his mother, Lady Evelyn Peterson, which ultimately resulted in her death. But I fancy there is queer blood in the family. After providing a thousand a year for the proper maintenance of Carl, who is now dead, the will proceeded to devise the whole of the remainder of the testator's property to "my eldest son, Arthur"—same name as your husband's, Sylviane.'

'Is all this part of the news?' said Sylviane, innocently. 'It sounds as if it was going to be awfully elaborate.'

'Yes, it is part of the news. Now for the next point. Although Carl Peterson was a sort of public character, I had never seen a portrait of him till that day. I have, I may remark, an extraordinary memory for faces, and I instantly said to myself, "I have seen that man somewhere." And I was soon able to recall the time and place. I once practised for a short time in Edinburgh, and one night—this must have been nearly thirty years ago—a man knocked me up and asked me to go to his wife, who was dangerously ill.'

'What was the illness? Did you save her?' asked Sylviane.

Mechanically Arthur put his hand on his wife's arm as if to check her.

Dr. Colpus smiled indulgently at the interruption.

'Yes, I saved her. As for the illness, that night a son was born. Now, as I sat in the reading-room at the Cecil, I was absolutely sure that the man who had knocked me up that night thirty years ago in Edinburgh was

none other than Carl Peterson, whose portrait I had seen in the *Graphic*. Strange, was it not?'

'Very,' murmured Arthur, and he sipped again his champagne.

The Doctor resumed:

'Having a taste for mysteries, and knowing that, so far as the world in general was aware, Carl Peterson had only had one wife, a peer's daughter, I casually went to Edinburgh and made a few inquiries. These inquiries were singularly successful. Armed with the portrait, I interviewed landladies and parish clerks, and I consulted registers, and within three days I collected positive proof that Carl Peterson had lived a year or two in Edinburgh, had married there, and had had a son.'

'In his own name?' asked Arthur.

'Not in his own name; I will tell you the name presently.'

'Tell me now,' Arthur demanded, and looked at Mrs. Cavalossi.

'Yes, tell him at once,' said Mrs. Cavalossi.

'The name was Forrest, and, to cut the tale short, you are that son.'

'Oh!' cried Sylviane. 'Well——' She stopped, gazing at her mother.

There was still a little champagne in Arthur's glass. He calmly poured it on to the tablecloth and set the glass down. Mrs. Cavalossi laughed at the odd trick.

'You are a curious young man!' said Mrs. Cavalossi.

Arthur bowed.

'You would infer then, Doctor,' said Arthur, 'that Carl Peterson's reputed wife was not his wife at all; that Carl Peterson was a bigamist, and that the two sons brought up in Staffordshire were not legitimate?'

'I would infer that,' assented the Doctor; 'it is beyond question. I know what constitutes legal proof, and I have that proof.'

'Do you know why Carl Peterson should have deserted his wife in Edinburgh?'

'I do not know, and I fancy that mystery will be a mystery for ever. But, tell me, do my facts agree with your early recollections?'

'They agree with them so far that I never knew my father,' answered Arthur, 'and also that my mother told me frankly that my father had disappeared.'

'Ah!' said the Doctor.

Mrs. Cavalossi beamed upon her son-in-law, disclosing her superb teeth.

'Your mother, I have been told, is dead,' said the Doctor.

Arthur signed an affirmative. The Doctor began again:

'Carl Peterson's will was proved by the executors. It orders that "my eldest son, Arthur," shall not receive his heritage until he attains a certain age, and that until then he shall receive an allowance of only five hundred a year. Peterson was a fellow of whims, but I can see some sense in that arrangement. By the way, if my information is correct, the millionaire left his Edinburgh wife, your mother, when you were only a few days old?'

'So she once told me.'

'Ah!' said the Doctor again, 'then Carl Peterson never knew that you had been named Arthur; that, in fact, by a not very remarkable coincidence, he had two sons named Arthur. Nevertheless, you, and not the Staffordshire Arthur, are the "my eldest son Arthur" referred to in the will.' Dr. Colpus paused. 'You take it very calmly,' said he at length.

The tinkle of Sylviane's bracelets as she moved her hand sounded loud in the room.

'I will tell you why,' Arthur replied; 'I knew the whole thing before—I have known it since the day my mother died.'

With the swiftness of lightning Mrs. Cavalossi and the Doctor exchanged a glance. Sylviane drew in her breath.

'Since your mother died?' murmured Sylviane, repeating Arthur's last phrase almost mechanically.

'My mother's dying legacy to me was the history of my father's scoundrelism,' said Arthur bitterly. And then there was a pause.

'Of course,' Doctor Colpus put in suavely, 'it is a subject upon which you must feel very deeply.'

'I do,' Arthur agreed.

As the two conspirators eyed the young man's firm and set lips a qualm of anxiety and apprehension crossed their gilded dreams of the future. Both had an uneasy suspicion that this art-critic, usually so mild and simple in his ways, might be capable of the most extraordinary and disconcerting act. The Doctor mentally faced this possibility; the woman

characteristically tried to avoid it, to pretend to herself that it did not exist.

'We guessed, of course,' said Mrs. Cavalossi, 'that some of the facts which the Doctor had to place before you would give you pain; but we hoped'—here she smiled with a touch of roguishness—'that the general effect of our news would be—er—joyous, my dear Arthur.'

'Your hope was an excusable one,' said Arthur coldly, in a tone which at the same time implied that it was a very foolish hope.

'Forgive my curiosity,' the Doctor picked up the conversation, which seemed about to languish into an awkward silence; 'but have you any idea why your father and your mother agreed to part?'

'My father and my mother did not agree to part,' said Arthur.

'But they ceased to live together?'

'My father deserted my mother. Have you not yourself already implied as much?'

'Was the difference between them due to what is called incompatibility of temper?'

'There was no difference; it happened thus, so my poor mother told me: My father persuaded her that they were not legally

married; he actually pretended to her that he had deceived her—he made himself out to be a villain in the eyes of the woman he loved.'

There was another pause. At least two of the party had anticipated a pleasant, even a politely uproarious, evening. They had imagined that this wonderful news of Arthur's title to vast wealth would be seasoned with laughter and washed down with wine; and lo! here was an atmosphere of gloom, constraint, and mystery!

'You asked me just now,' pursued the Doctor, 'if I knew why your father left your mother. I could not reply; but perhaps you know the answer yourself.'

'Perhaps,' said Arthur, in the same cold and sinister tone. 'Before marrying my mother my father had had sentimental relations with Lady Evelyn Hart, but they had been abruptly broken off by the lady's parents; my father was not rich enough then to claim a peer's daughter. Afterwards Lady Evelyn became an orphan and her own mistress, and she wrote to my father, unaware that in the meantime he had married my mother. Instantly my father conceived the plan of deserting my mother; of

suppressing his marriage with her, and going through another ceremony with Lady Evelyn. He began his campaign of infamy by pretending, as I have said, that his marriage with my mother was not a legal one. He really convinced her of this, and it was not till years afterwards that she discovered the trick played upon her. Next he told her that he was tired of her, that she had no claim on him, and that he proposed to leave her. He offered her money, which she indignantly refused. He called her a fool, and departed, in quest of Lady Evelyn. My mother was left penniless in Edinburgh, with a child a few days old—you see, it was imperative that my father should lose no time in replying to Lady Evelyn's invitation. The scheme was a bold one—it was bold to the point of rashness; but it succeeded. My father, I fancy, had a knack of making things succeed; it was this knack, coupled with his perfect disregard of all obligations, save the obligation to "get on," that left him with a fortune of over two millions. In some ways my father was a great man.'

'And so Mr. Peterson began an entirely new life in Staffordshire?' said Mrs. Cavalossi.

'An entirely new life.'

'I trust your mother was never in actual distress.'

'She was never in actual monetary distress; Heaven watched over her. An aunt of hers died, and left this dear creature—who thought herself a shamed woman, while she was really a lawful wife—a tolerably large sum of money. With this money my mother bought an annuity on my life. It was not a wise thing to do, but she was unversed in business affairs. Had she been a little less simple and confiding, perhaps Carl Peterson would not so easily have imposed on her.'

'You have our sympathies, Mr. Forrest,' said Dr. Colpus. 'May the earth lie lightly on the graves of both your mother and father—the sinned against and the sinner!' The Doctor uttered this excellent sentiment with an admirable histrionic talent. Then he continued, as a sort of after-thought: 'You have told us that you were aware of the whole thing. Did you, then, know the details of Carl Peterson's will?'

'Yes,' replied Arthur with undiminished calmness, 'I did. Let me add my little store

of facts on that part of the affair. The Staffordshire Arthur will be twenty-five years of age, and in a position to demand the property from the executors, on the twentieth of September next. The Staffordshire Arthur happens to be an acquaintance of mine.'

'An acquaintance of yours?' exclaimed Mrs. Cavalossi, obviously startled.

'A friend—a dear friend,' said Arthur.

'How did that friendship arise?'

'We first saw each other in Spain, where I was travelling from city to city in search of pictures. The precise circumstances are of no importance. Arthur Peterson confided in me. He told me all about the provisions of his father's will.'

'And you revealed your identity to him?'

'No, I did not reveal my identity to him.'

'Why not?'

'I preferred not to do so. I may mention that, after losing sight of him for a period, I met him on the Boulogne steamer to-day; he is now in Folkestone. He will call here to-morrow morning in order to be introduced to Sylviane. You thought to astonish me, Doctor. Admit that I have astonished you.'

But the Doctor was silent, busy with the examination of Arthur's face.

'How piquant,' murmured Mrs. Cavalossi; 'and how excessively awkward it will be for you, Arthur, to tell your friend that that two millions and three-quarters will never be his. Perhaps you had better leave it to the Doctor to break the news to him.'

'The Doctor will oblige me by saying nothing to Arthur Peterson.'

'That is, of course, as you wish. But may I ask, my dearest Arthur, why you have delayed the matter so long? Every day makes it more delicate for you if this poor boy is your friend.'

'I have no intention of claiming my father's fortune,' he said.

'Do you mean that?' asked Dr. Colpus, in a low voice; 'or are you appealing to our sense of humour?'

Arthur waited for the fraction of an instant before answering.

'I mean it.' His tones were absolutely steady.

'Arthur!' screamed Sylviane sharply, pointing with an hysteric movement of the hand to her mother.

The beautiful Mrs. Cavalossi had suddenly risen from her chair. Her face was blanched and tremulous with passion. The features were transformed, and the eyes shot down upon Arthur a burning, consuming ray of anger.

'You are a fool!' she gasped; 'but, before heaven, I will cure you of your folly!'

CHAPTER V

THE DOCTOR EXPLAINS A MILLION IN VAIN

Not only Arthur, but the imperturbable Dr. Colpus himself, was obviously amazed by this outburst on the part of Mrs. Cavalossi. As for Sylviane, she seemed to be more alarmed than astonished—it was as though she had been accustomed to the phenomenon. The two men looked from one to the other of the two women, Arthur distinctly amazed and at a loss, the quick-witted old Doctor searching within his active brain for some solution of the difficulty.

The atmosphere was tense, electric ; each wondered what would happen next. Arthur's eyes showed that a quarrel might burst like a thunder-cloud at any moment. Everything depended on the next words spoken.

Then Mrs. Cavalossi smiled exquisitely and her features resumed their normal sweetness.

'Forgive me, my dear Arthur,' she said, 'but the temptation was irresistible; I could not help that bit of acting. But it appears that I startled you instead of making you laugh. Really, I quite meant you to laugh. You ought to have laughed at my little joke—you who can so lightly refuse an offer of millions.'

She sat down again and poured out some wine.

To look at that calm and smooth face in repose, with its delicious contours and charming gradations of colour, no one would have guessed that it was capable of such a transformation as that through which it had just passed. There are some feminine natures which remain placid for years, like the slopes of an unsuspected volcano, and then, like a volcano, break out viciously into clouds of anger and lava-torrents of vituperation. The damage done may be trifling, or it may be disastrous, but all in the vicinity have realised the lurking danger, and they go in fear of it for a time. In due course the danger is forgotten again; the volcano sleeps; the lava-beds are overgrown with vegetation; the

landscape smiles. Perhaps only one person remembers the past, and counts the risk of the future. In this case that one person was Sylviane. Sylviane knew her mother; not with the scientific insight of Dr. Colpus's trained intelligence, but by a sheer and profound instinct almost infantile in its sure divinations. Sylviane sighed now—a sigh made up equally of thankfulness and of apprehension. It was as though she had once witnessed the entombment of Herculaneum and Pompeii by Vesuvius, and the sight of fire and smoke, the sound of rumbling, had reconstituted the scene before her mind's eye—an eye which plainly perceived the possibility of further similar disasters.

Through what crises, one wondered, had not the daughter passed with her mother during the years of her earlier girlhood!

The air was temporarily cleared. Sylviane glanced timidly at her mother, and then at her husband. Dr. Colpus seized the chance, and began to speak in his low, even, reassuring voice.

'Ah! millions!' he said; 'people often talk of millions without in the least realising

what a million is, what it means, what it stands for. Now, Sylviane—you permit the old Doctor still to call you by that name, eh?—have you, for instance, any idea of what a million pounds is?'

'Not the least in the world, Doctor,' she answered calmly; and then added, with a gaze suddenly cold and scrutinising upon her husband: 'And I don't believe Arthur has, either.'

Arthur Forrest shrugged his shoulders.

'I have no practical interest in millions,' said he; and it was obvious that he was endeavouring to look bored by the tedium of this after-dinner interview. 'I mean——'

'Let me try to tell you what a million is,' said the Doctor, without allowing Arthur time to say anything further. 'A million pounds means an income of a hundred pounds a day, every day for ever. The fortune which Carl Peterson left is at this moment increasing by means of interest at the rate of two thousand pounds a week. Think of that! No one is doing anything to it, yet it is mounting up at the rate of ten pounds every hour, day and night. So much for the wonderful mechanism

of interest. The man who ultimately handles that fortune will be one of the most powerful men in the most powerful country in the world. Without any ability on his own part, he could become anything he chose, even to a marquis. He could spend a thousand pounds a week and still save half his income. He could found hospitals, build art galleries and museums, endow libraries, erect magnificent churches, succour the poor of a whole city, and scarcely feel these outlays.'

'Is there anything he couldn't do?' laughed Arthur.

'Yes,' said the Doctor, 'there is. He couldn't spend the whole of his income on himself and get value for it. I defy any man worth nearly three millions, however expensive his tastes, to spend the whole of his income on himself. Unless he absolutely threw the money in the street, he must either support scores of charities or get richer and more powerful in spite of himself. That is why some of those Yankees one hears of—men who were worth a million or so some ten years since—are worth ten and twenty millions to-day; not because they desired these extra

millions, but because they could not avoid them.'

'It seems to me,' said Arthur, 'that you are bringing forward a very strong argument in favour of my declining this terrible fortune, which would grow whether I wanted it to grow or not. According to you, in a few years I should be so disgustingly, so oppressively rich that I should be a nuisance not only to myself but to my friends.'

'Scarcely to your friends, Mr. Forrest,' the Doctor smiled. 'And as to becoming a nuisance to yourself, if it is a bore to be in a position to realise every wish, to have no whim unfulfilled, then all I can say is that there are a number of people on this planet who would desire nothing better than to be bored.'

'Ah, well,' said Arthur, as if to finish the matter, 'I decided this question once and for all many years ago.'

The Doctor put on a solemn and serious look.

'Let me say one word to you, Mr. Forrest, in the presence of your wife and of your wife's mother,' he began. 'I am an old man, and you will pardon me for speaking plainly. You

are young enough to have been my son. You have no right to refuse this fortune. It is yours. If you allow another to hold and enjoy it, you will be doing an injustice—and the worst of all injustices, an injury to yourself. Vast wealth is a social responsibility—no one has the right to shirk it. You know as well as I do that the fortune is yours ; knowing that, you must also know that it is your duty to see that that fortune is properly administered, put to the best uses. Apart from the question of your mother's memory——'

'I will thank you, Doctor,' interrupted Arthur, 'to leave my mother's memory out of the discussion.'

'I say, apart from the question of your mother's memory,' insisted the Doctor with firmness, 'you are utterly wrong in sacrificing this wealth, which is so legitimately yours, from a mere exaggerated notion of friendship.'

'Notion of friendship?' repeated Arthur.

'Yes,' said the Doctor, smiling shrewdly. 'Do you think that I cannot trace your motives, young man? Here is this unfortunate youth, Arthur Peterson, brought up in the expectation of great, of exceptionally great,

wealth. You, on the other hand, were brought up differently; you had no such golden vista always before your eyes. Then, one day, you learn that this dreamed-of wealth is not yours, but his. You are his friend, you have told us so; you love him—perhaps he has some claim on your gratitude. And so, with superb unselfishness, you say to yourself: "The blow would be too cruel for him. I don't want the money. I will never tell him that it is mine." That, Mr. Forrest, is what you said to yourself. I admire you for it; but, nevertheless, such a course is inexcusable. Moreover, let me tell you that you have not yet grasped what it is that you are doing.'

'How did you learn all this?' said Arthur, without stirring in his chair.

'It seems plain to me,' answered the Doctor.

'Then permit me to say, Doctor, that you are totally mistaken in your assumptions. Considerations of friendship never entered my head; I was governed in my action by something far deeper.'

'You despise money—is that it?' The suave Doctor almost sneered.

'If you care to put it that way, I do,' said Arthur.

The two men had hitherto had the conversation to themselves, but now Mrs. Cavalossi could keep silence no longer.

'If you forget yourself, Arthur,' she said, 'you should not forget my daughter.'

She was calm, but only with an effort.

Arthur looked at his wife, whose face was impassive, illegible, like a lovely mask.

'As regards money,' he said, 'I owe nothing to Sylviane. I did not marry her under false pretences. You knew my income. You said you would give Sylviane as much as I had. I agreed. That made a total of eight hundred a year. What more can we need? These millions—what are they to me? I have my life-work to perform, and not all the millions of Europe will help me to perform it.'

'Your life-work?' queried Mrs. Cavalossi.

'Yes,' said Arthur.

'And may we respectfully inquire what that is?'

'I think, dear Mrs. Cavalossi,' he replied suavely, but with a formidable calmness, 'I think that you and I have several times

discussed the book about the origins of Italian art upon which I am engaged; more than once you have been good enough to speak quite enthusiastically concerning it. You have encouraged me to continue—you have said that such a labour as I have in hand was worth the doing, and that it would be of permanent benefit to the artistic life of the world.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Cavalossi, somewhat altering her tone, 'that is true enough. But——'

The Doctor broke in: 'Of course that might be a life-work for a poor man; but a rich man, a very rich man—one of the richest men in England—should surely undertake something of wider import, something of larger benefit to humanity.'

'You forget one thing, Doctor,' said Arthur.

'What is that?'

'Merely that I am not a rich man—I am a poor man. As I said, I married Sylviane as a poor man. I was brought up to be a poor man, I have always expected to be a poor man, and a poor man I hope to remain; that is, if a man who has enough for his needs can be called poor.'

'You are not rich at the moment,' the Doctor answered, 'but you have only to claim your riches.'

'That I shall never do.'

'Forgive me, my dear Arthur,' said Mrs. Cavalossi, 'if I remark that I may deem it my duty, in case you should carry your quaintness too far, to claim those riches on your behalf for my daughter's sake.'

'Nothing whatever could be done without me,' said Arthur politely. 'I know very little of the law, but I am quite sure of that.' Then he added: 'This is not a matter about which one argues, it is a matter about which one feels—it is a question of emotion, not of reason. And I tell you that nothing will induce me to claim my father's millions from Arthur Peterson—nothing!'

The young man's tone was final, beyond appeal. In the momentous silence which followed he again looked at his wife. This time Sylviane met his gaze; a scarcely perceptible crimson crept over the marble of her beautiful features; she looked timidly at her mother from beneath her long dark lashes. Then, with a little sigh, she leaned over towards

her husband, and with her fragile fingers gently stroked his hand which lay on the table.

He started; it was as though by that simple action the terrible die of fate had been cast. Mrs. Cavalossi stared fixedly at the couple.

'Come along, Sylviane,' Arthur said, springing up. 'Put on your cloak; we two will go out for a little stroll.'

When they were outside the door, in the darkness of the passage, he drew her to him. 'Sylvie!' he murmured.

Her long delicate arms were locked passionately round his neck.

They walked on the Leas—that vast electrically lighted plateau where the wealth, the vulgarity, and the Jewry of England may be seen every fine summer evening digesting dinner, ogling, flirting, flaunting, and pretending to listen to one of the worst bands in Europe. The huge hotels and the immense boarding-houses, whose bay windows and balconies look down complacently upon the crowd and the expanse of trodden lawn, had emptied themselves into the balmy night, and every one was out of doors. A full moon was halfway towards the zenith, and in her luminance the

waves of the Channel glittered and shone in broken reflections. A couple of miles off shore a torpedo-destroyer swung like a menace or a foreboding. The band in the large bandstand was performing 'Soldiers of the Queen'—that deathless melody; and thousands of persons lounging in chairs were grouped in vast concentric circles round this musical hub. Thousands of others paraded to and fro. And all of them — the Jewesses in *décolleté* bodices and picture-hats, the paterfamilias and the materfamilias of good blood and many ancestors, the financiers who support the Empire and the smart restaurants and the music-halls, the actresses who get a hundred pounds a week for a curve of the arm, the men-about-town who mysteriously exist and keep a racing-stable on nothing a year, the maidens of the marriage-mart, the dowagers who have lived and want to live again as though nothing had happened, even the cripples in bath-chairs—all pretended to themselves that they were happy and in the act of enjoyment. If it had not been pathetic it would have been ridiculous, this nocturnal masquerade at the most fashionable pleasure resort in England.

'Let's get away from this,' said Arthur.

Husband and wife walked by the edge of the cliff towards Sandgate, and then descended through the shrubberies by the zigzag path towards the margin of the sea. Near the foot Sylviane paused at one of the seats thoughtfully placed by the town council in a nook cut into the undergrowth.

They sat down. It was quite dark here. The steep side of the cliff rose almost perpendicularly above them, cutting off the moonbeams. The restful, sleepy splash of short waves on the sand made a continuous murmur.

'Arthur!' said Sylviane, in a murmur that resembled the murmur of the sea.

He pressed her fragile hand, which gleamed faintly white in the shadows.

'I wish I could tell you how splendid I think you are!' she said, with shy enthusiasm.

'I was afraid you would think me a brute!' he replied happily.

'There will be trouble,' she exclaimed later.

'Trouble? Why should there be trouble? We are our own masters.'

'There will be trouble,' she repeated; 'but, O Arthur, you must always believe in me.'

'My love!' he entreated, half in alarm, half soothingly, 'what on earth do you mean by saying that? Of course I shall always believe in you; why do you say such things?'

But Sylviane made no answer. She kissed him, and a tear from her eye fell on his cheek.

CHAPTER VI

THE CONQUEST OF MRS. CAVALOSSI

MEANWHILE Mrs. Cavalossi and Dr. Colpus were left alone in the dining-room.

Mrs. Cavalossi laughed; it was a vicious laugh, a laugh like a threat, and yet a little apprehensive, too.

The Doctor looked inquiringly at her across the rich *débris* of the table. In the soft crimson glow of the lights it seemed to him that she had not altered a whit in sixteen years. Her beauty was as imperious, as compelling, as perfect as ever.

'Why do you laugh?' he said.

'Sylviane will cure him of his fancies,' said Mrs. Cavalossi.

'You think so?'

'She can do what she likes with him,' said Mrs. Cavalossi carelessly.

'Suppose she has fallen in love with him?'

'Sylviane in love with that boy! Scarcely!'

'But Sylviane is only a girl.'

'Pardon me; Sylviane is a woman. She is my daughter and my pupil—she knows what she is about; she knows exactly what is necessary to be done. He adores her; she will play her cards well. We are safe, in spite of his absurdities.'

'You have given Sylviane her instructions?'

'I gave them six months ago, before she had met him; I have had no occasion to vary them. With beauty like Sylviane's, one's instructions, even in an affair as big as this, need only be simple; men are such babies.'

'But suppose she disobeys you?'

Mrs. Cavalossi laughed again.

'It is impossible,' she murmured, with conviction.

'Nevertheless,' said the Doctor gravely, 'I warn you that she will disobey you.'

'She is incapable of it,' said Mrs. Cavalossi. One might have detected a suspicion of forced bravado in her voice.

'When a woman is in love she is capable of anything.'

'You harp on that string; I tell you that

the idea is absurd. She simply can't be in love with him.'

'Why not?'

'I merely know—that's all.'

'What do *you* know of love?' asked the Doctor, a little bitterly. 'Recollect that I have enjoyed your acquaintance now for many years.'

'Too many!' she remarked.

'You have said something like that before, once,' he retorted. 'Do not repeat yourself—it is unworthy of a woman of your originality. I ask you what *you* know of love.'

'Perhaps more than you imagine.' The natural woman showed herself for a fleeting instant in her tone.

'Then you do love me?' he said, as quick as lightning.

She looked at the table-cloth. He had read her soul, but she could not admit the fact. 'Oblige me by keeping to the point,' she said with an admirable imitation of coldness. 'We were discussing whether Sylviane is or is not in love with Arthur Forrest.'

'She is.'

'Impossible,' said Mrs. Cavalossi.

'You did not observe her look when he asked her to go out for a walk. It was a look of the sort that no woman can counterfeit —I have seen the same look in your eyes, Marie.'

'Even if she were in love with him' (Mrs. Cavalossi defended her position obstinately), 'she would still obey my instructions. Why should she not? Sylviane is a creature designed and made to exist in the luxury of boundless wealth. The giving of pleasure to such women as Sylviane forms the sole excuse for great wealth; she will take care to obtain possession of that wealth for her own sake.'

'Your argument is both powerful and philosophical'—the Doctor smiled—'up to a certain point. The sole proper purpose of great wealth is to provide expensive felicities for charming and beautiful women—that is a maxim which should be widely diffused; but permit me to inform you that Sylviane no longer cares for wealth.'

'Why do you say that?'

'She cares for her husband instead. Wealth will be nothing to her in the future. I

would wager a ten-pound note that at this moment they are billing and cooing in some sequestered seat. Why, Sylviane regards his refusal of the Peterson fortune as a great sacrificial act. She admires him for it; she looks on him as a hero. Arthur could twist her round his little finger.'

'Our precious Arthur! Nonsense!'

'Our precious Arthur; and it is not nonsense; it is deep wisdom, and you ought to be much beholden to me.'

Mrs. Cavalossi pouted. The Doctor was really becoming too absurd.

'But our precious Arthur is so—so colourless. Why, although I am only his mother-in-law, if I had him to myself for an hour I would undertake to bring him to reason.'

'You consider that Mr. Forrest is a fool?'

'He may be a great authority on pictures of Madonnas and saints, and that sort of thing; but when it comes to anything else——'

'Marie,' the Doctor interrupted, smiling as a man only smiles at a pretty woman, 'only your beauty could excuse such rank stupidity. Upon my word, talk of the insight of women; I never met with it; no, never—it is a

stupendous fable. Listen, adorable creature. I have not yet fathomed Arthur Forrest's real motives, but I can tell you this: neither you nor Sylviane (even if she wished to do so) will persuade him out of his resolve. Have you been blind to his chin? People with chins like that never give way. Because he is a little awkward, because he doesn't splutter over with agreeable small talk, because he isn't invariably dressed in the height of fashion—like me—you think he hasn't got two ideas in his head to knock together; you think he doesn't possess a will of his own. You were seldom more profoundly deceived.'

Mrs. Cavalossi made an impatient noise between her teeth.

'You always were a bully, my friend,' said she, 'and you are trying to bully me now. You are a man all over, with your superior airs. Well, you amuse me—that is all. I will play my own game first, and then if that fails you can try.'

'There is only one game,' he said quietly, 'and that is yours and mine jointly. If you play it and lose it the thing is finished. A game cannot be won after it is lost. No,

Marie, I will play this game; it is a game which I invented.'

'You invented?'

'Invented,' he repeated. 'Who discovered first the particulars of this peculiar Peterson family secret? who saw first the possibilities which lay dormant in Sylviane? who imagined the scheme through which, by means of Sylviane, you were to be not only the prettiest, but the richest, woman in Europe—was it you or I?'

'Oh, well,' she said, 'of course you first thought of it.'

'Good,' he ejaculated.

'You also said the scheme was faultless—that it could not fail.'

'Ah,' said he; 'but I had not reckoned on the singular character of Arthur Clinton Forrest, nor on his weird views with regard to money. Nevertheless, I repeat now that it will not fail—that is, if I continue to control. But only I can carry it to success. It was a bold scheme to begin with; it will have to be bolder than ever. Do you feel equal to it, Marie?'

'Was I frightened before?' she answered, coldly.

'To do you justice, you weren't,' he said. 'Still, as I say, we shall now require even more courage.'

'You exaggerate the difficulties, my friend.'

'The difficulties cannot be exaggerated,' he said; 'they are tremendous; only the alliance of beauty like yours and brains like mine could overcome them.'

He spoke with gravity, and it appeared that at last he had convinced her that their common path was less smooth than she had thought.

'Let us begin then,' she said.

'I will proceed to describe the first step,' he resumed, having cleared his throat somewhat nervously. 'It is essential that we should be constantly together, Marie; you will be useless without me, I shall be powerless without you. In order to save appearances, and ease the way, you must—we must get married.'

She looked at him. 'You presume on my good nature,' she almost hissed at him.

'How so?'

The good doctor rose from the table, and stood against the mantel-piece.

'By daring to introduce that subject again. Can you not see, have you not got the sense to perceive, that our relations are solely in the nature of business relations? I tolerate you because you are useful to me—and for no other reason. Why do you oblige me thus to speak plainly?'

'My sweetest pet,' he replied, 'I am proposing that we should become husband and wife for the sake of business. Surely there is nothing unusual in that? There are ten thousand people in Folkestone to-night who married each other and who tolerate each other entirely for the sake of business.'

'I hate you,' she said.

'Do not repeat that lie,' he remarked; 'I have already warned you against repetition. You do not hate me: you love me; I can see plainly into the recesses of your soul, Marie. There is only one thing there that I cannot fathom, and that is, why you should pretend to yourself that you do not like your Colpus.'

He approached her, and imperturbably stroked her hair.

'Look up at me.'

She looked up.

'How do you know that I love you?' she asked him in a low voice.

'By the same signs that I know that Sylviane loves Arthur Forrest.'

This said, he moved away to the window, and sat down on a chair. Her eyes never left him.

'You know I adore you madly,' he continued, smiling.

She made a gesture of impatience. 'Why need we be always together?' she asked.

'Angel, dare I leave you alone? Have you already forgotten that pretty melodramatic display of yours at dinner to-night? I tremble to think what might have happened had I not been here to create by my mere presence an atmosphere of diplomatic calm. The difficulty might have developed into an open rupture.'

'And what if it had?' she queried.

'We should have had to begin everything anew. Besides, it would have been so inartistic, so unworthy of our skill.'

'You are the only man I was ever afraid of,' she whispered. She had the air of a daunted puma, and the curious thing was that

Dr. Colpus had seemed to exert no personal force whatever. He had stroked her hair.

'I know it,' he concurred. And then a long, a very long silence fell, a silence broken by nothing but the soft regular intake of Mrs. Cavalossi's breath.

'Bah!' she said, cutting him short, 'marry me if you like, then. As you said just now, you have enjoyed my acquaintance for many years; you should, therefore, by this time, know something about the risks you take in offering your hand.'

'You accept, Marie?'

'I accept.'

'Come over here and kiss me,' he said carelessly.

Strange to relate, she obeyed him like a slave.

'Sit beside me, my darling,' he said. And they shared the lounge chair.

She took his hand. 'Frank!' she murmured, and he smiled. By some extraordinary fatuity, or lack of insight, on the part of his parents, Dr. Colpus had been baptismally named Francis. It was the last name in the world that they should have bestowed on him.

'Say it again,' he commanded; 'I like it.'

'Frank!' she murmured once more.

It was a strange love-making, bizarre, weird, even repellent—but it was love-making.

'Just as you have always loved me,' he went on with the scene, 'so I have always loved you. But I loved you far more since your husband's death than I did before.'

'Why?' she asked, almost voiceless.

'Because I am fully aware that you practically killed him, Marie. You have courage, and there is nothing in a woman that I admire more—— Oh, no! I am not in the least afraid that my own life will be shortened at your hands. Kiss me again!'

She sighed, and laid her head on his shoulder; it seemed as if she almost swooned. 'I hated you because I knew you knew and didn't care,' she stammered; 'oh! you make me afraid.' Then she closed her eyes; he soothed her.

Yes, it was a strange love-making.

'Now the next step,' said Mrs. Cavalossi; 'we have agreed that the first step in your scheme to overcome Arthur Forrest shall be our marriage; tell me the next step.'

'Not this evening,' he replied blandly, 'I am going back to London early to-morrow, and I must have a good night's rest. I always think in the morning—never after a good dinner, and especially never after my hand has been accepted in matrimony by a beautiful woman.'

They both laughed like children.

CHAPTER VII

MRS. CAVALOSSI AND SYLVIANE

'By the way,' said Dr. Colpus, leaning down to Mrs. Cavalossi through the window of the first-class carriage, 'how much money have you left now?'

The London train was on the point of departure. It was yet early morning, the hour of milkmen and postmen. The station had a chill, unused, deserted look; the passengers were few, and for the most part still gaping with astonishment at finding themselves out of bed. Dr. Colpus, however, and Mrs. Cavalossi also, contrived to be alert, vivacious, and fully awake.

They had breakfasted together and walked to the station together, and talked industriously together for the space of one hour and a quarter. Physically they were both superb animals. Dr. Colpus had the elasticity of a man in early prime; Mrs. Cavalossi had the

waist and the neck of a girl, and she invariably enjoyed the outrageous health of a Cossack.

'How much have you got left?' repeated the Doctor.

Mrs. Cavalossi frowned a little.

'Oh, pretty well,' she answered, after a pause.

'Have you got five thousand?'

'No.'

'Three thousand?'

'Yes; a little over that.'

'Ah! Let us confront the facts; let us look them in the face. You told me the other day, did you not, that you reckoned it cost you a hundred a week to live?'

She nodded.

'Yes,' she said, 'about that.'

'That is fourteen pounds a day.'

'Is it? I was never good at mental arithmetic.'

'It seems a great deal,' he pursued.

'You know what hotels are.'

'Yes,' he replied, 'I have a sort of notion what hotels are; and I fancy I could live well in any hotel on a couple of pounds a day, or even thirty shillings.'

'Then there is Sims and Adela; don't forget those important personages.'

'They surely don't explain the difference between two and fourteen.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Cavalossi, 'one must have clothes; I assure you I haven't a rag to my back.'

'Perhaps not a rag'—he smiled, humouring her, but with a basis of urgent seriousness in his tone—'perhaps not a rag, but a confection in alpaca that must have cost as many guineas as there are days in a month.'

'Well?' she said, defiantly.

'Well,' he repeated, 'tell me how much you spend on clothing that fair form, in hiding that surpassing beauty from the world.'

'I don't know.'

'I wish you to calculate. Are you incapable of so doing?'

'Why these calculations?' putting her hand on his as it rested on the window.

He looked at that hand, or rather at the immaculate white glove that encased it.

'What expensive gloves!' he sighed. Then he continued in a new tone: 'Marie, we must be serious. Life is real, life is earnest. If

you are spending a hundred a week, and you have only three thousand pounds in hand——'

'How tedious you are, Frank!' she stopped him, again stroking his hand.

'That means you have enough for thirty weeks,' he said quietly, without appearing to notice the gesture. 'Thirty weeks is not long. Couldn't you retrench a little?'

'Impossible,' she answered, shaking her head vehemently. 'Besides, we have oceans of time, simply oceans——'

'Marie,' he interrupted her, 'you are divine, but you are a ninny; and the worst of it is you think yourself clever. You will ruin us both yet with your haste and rashness. Let me beg you to retrench. I repeat that thirty weeks will be all too short.'

'Simply oceans of time,' she said again, with the insistence of a parrot and the sweetness of a dove.

'I shall be angry with you in a moment,' he said.

'Remember that we are not married yet, my dear,' she retorted, 'and that any woman with a mind is at liberty to change that mind.'

He saw that she would not be serious; as a matter of fact, Mrs. Cavalossi was seldom serious at early morning. With her, as with all people of perfect health, early morning showed her at her brightest. It is only the valetudinarians, the hypochondriacs, and the swallowers of quack medicines, who improve as the day waxes.

'You are incurable,' he said; 'there are some of your moods in which you are deaf to reason. But let me inform you, Marie, that we are skating on very thin ice.'

'That is your conclusion after sleeping on the matter?'

'It is. If the ice gives way, do not say that I have not warned you.'

'Rubbish!' she ejaculated. 'You don't know what I can do; you treat me like a baby. How do you suppose I managed during those years when I had not the inestimable benefit of your co-operation in my schemes?'

'Ah!' he said, 'luck is always on the side of beauty.'

'Just so; that is my point.' She enjoyed the little score she had made.

'But occasionally the luck turns,' he said dreamily, and glanced at the signal ahead.

'Not against me,' she said imperturbably.

'Who can say?'

She merely smiled at him, half tolerant, half contemptuous. In that smile she subtly gave him to understand that for years and years to come nothing could ruin the possessor of such a face as hers.

'I shall stay here for the rest of the week,' she said boldly. 'Imagine that I have kissed you; good-bye. See you on Monday—in the meantime rely on me.'

'Good-bye, bright star,' he said gallantly; 'awfully good of you to see me off.'

He raised his hat and bowed. The guard whistled, the engine shrieked, and in another moment this loving couple were parted.

Mrs. Cavalossi, conscious of the perfection of her highly coloured alpaca frock, strolled amiably back to the hotel. The morning was perfect, but there was a suggestion of approaching thunder in the air. She sat down in a basket-chair within the precincts of the hotel entrance, and looked fixedly seawards in a rapt and absent manner. A slight curve of the lips

and nostrils seemed to indicate that the feeling uppermost in her mind was one of severe contempt—the contempt of a person who, assured of absolute power, looks down impatiently upon all the rest of the world.

'Good morning, mamma.'

'Sylviane!'

The sudden exquisite apparition of the girl startled Mrs. Cavalossi. Sylviane was attired in pink—the freshest pink of morn. The trailing gown enveloped her slim figure like a garment of cloud; her virginal face shone as a flower shines when the sun is young in the sky. Its surpassing and perfect beauty was intensified by a faint, elusive touch of sadness, which gave depth to the eyes and subtle meaning to the curves of the mouth.

Mrs. Cavalossi had a vague feeling of apprehension as she looked at her child. If her own beauty was power, what power must there be in the loveliness of Sylviane? She seemed to sink into inferiority in the presence of this young girl.

'Sit down, Sylvia,' said Mrs. Cavalossi, taking her hand. 'Have you had breakfast? Where is Arthur?'

'Adela brought me some tea. Arthur is staying in bed; he is not well.'

'Not well?' Mrs. Cavalossi turned round suddenly to her daughter, and then the germ of some strange thought seemed to strike her. 'What is the matter with him?'

'Headache. He says he will be all right by lunch-time. I think he is a little feverish; I shall ask Dr. Colpus to see him.'

'Dr. Colpus has returned to London; I have been with him to the station. Sylviane, I have a piece of news for you, and for Arthur too; I wish he had been up. Dr. Colpus has asked me to be his wife!'

'You are going to be married, mamma?'

'I merely said he had asked me to be his wife. Tell me, Sylviane, would you like me to accept him?'

The girl's eyes wavered.

'You are too young for Dr. Colpus, mamma, and too beautiful.'

'He does not think so, Sylvie. He is grey-haired, but he is an ideal lover. I have accepted him. We shall be married next week; you know the place.'

'Mamma, are you in love with him?'

Mrs. Cavalossi laughed.

'Possibly,' she replied; and then: 'I adore him.'

Sylviane should have said something fit for such an occasion, but she happened to say nothing, and there was a difficult silence; even Mrs. Cavalossi was troubled. A restraint seemed to have sprung up between mother and daughter. To find refuge from it they both began to watch the hotel servants, who were vigorously polishing the brasswork of the double doors within the entrance. Guests were not supposed to be abroad at that hour, especially pretty women. The attendants were coming nearer now, and it would have been impossible to continue any private conversation.

'I think I will go to Arthur,' said Sylviane, getting up from her seat.

'I am coming upstairs, too,' said Mrs. Cavalossi.

They went up the broad staircase together in silence.

At the door of Arthur's bedroom Sylviane stopped; there was no one else in the long corridor.

'Oh, mamma,' she whispered, kissing her, 'why are you going to marry him? What does it mean?'

'Mean?' Mrs. Cavalossi repeated the word; 'it means that I don't want to spend a solitary old age; it means that our dear, good Doctor requires a nurse. What else should it mean? Go and nurse your own darling, Sylvie, and I will dream of mine.'

An hour later, just as Mrs. Cavalossi was preparing to go for a walk, Sylviane ran into the drawing-room.

'Mamma, he is ill!'

There was an appealing apprehension in the tremulous tones. Mrs. Cavalossi happened to be examining the handle of a new umbrella. She looked up quickly at the young wife, whose face told the same tale as her voice.

'Ill?' said Mrs. Cavalossi.

'Yes—— At least, I think so.'

'You said it was only a headache.'

'I said he was a little feverish, too, mamma.' The young wife's attitude towards her mother was that of a timid schoolgirl.

'But people with bad headaches are often a little feverish. You are silly, my dear.'

'I know, mamma; but I cannot help it. I'm dreadfully afraid he's going to be ill.'

'Going to be ill!' repeated Mrs. Cavalossi, and her own voice sounded to her as though it came from a great distance.

Again a strange thought seemed to strike her, but this time more strongly. Her features gave no sign, yet within her soul she saw the finger of Fate stretched forth inviting her to grasp it. Her supreme luck, that luck which had never deserted her for long, was once more at her call. Already a plan formed vaguely in her mind. She saw the future; she saw events waiting to be moulded by a powerful, unscrupulous hand. She could have laughed as, like lightning, she sketched out the disaster which should presently occur; Dr. Colpus should see what she was capable of without his assistance. She was born to succeed—hell itself was on her side.

'I will go and see Arthur for myself,' she said.

'Yes, do. He wants to see you, mamma'; Sylvie accepted the suggestion eagerly. 'He told me to ask you to go into his bedroom.'

'Why didn't you tell me before?' said Mrs. Cavalossi, rising.

'I—I—I thought you didn't like going into sick rooms; you would never come into mine.'

'Sick room! Fiddlestick! It appears to me that Arthur gets ill very suddenly. Are you not worrying yourself about nothing?' she paused; 'why should you worry?' There was a momentary hint of kindness in her tone.

'Mother!'

'Have you fallen in love with your husband?' continued Mrs. Cavalossi, her voice hardening again.

'Mother,' answered the girl passionately, 'he didn't marry me for my money; he isn't mercenary.' Her eyes were fixed on the floor.

'You are convinced of that?'

'Did he not prove it last night?'

'Sylvie, don't be absurd. He will soon change his mind about that, you will see; it was only a pose. You will find him really ready enough to live on *your* fortune. Besides, it is your business to make him change.'

'I can't do it, mamma.'

'You can if you try.'

'Mammy, I shall never try.'

Mrs. Cavalossi put down her umbrella.

'Sylvie, it will be unfortunate for you if you and I quarrel. I have brought you up as a woman of the world, I have allowed you to have no illusions; six months ago you were all I could wish. You regarded marriage as what it is—a matter of business. I unfold a scheme by which we might be really rich, not half rich, you and I; you had no scruples then. We were to make the acquaintance of Arthur Forrest, who, as we then thought, was ignorant of his title to the Peterson estate, and you were to marry him. I told you that he would be ready enough to marry you when he knew you were worth twenty thousand pounds. I was right! He was attracted by your beauty and your fortune at once. He acted as any other man would have done—he took the bait.'

'No, mamma; he fell in love with me.'

'Stuff, Sylviane! Anyhow, he married you. It turns out that he did know of the claim to the Peterson estate, though, for some reason, he had made no move in the affair. We received a slight check last night; but

what of that? If, as you say, he is in love with you, two words from you will make him spring on to the Peterson millions like a tiger.'

'But I shall not say them.'

Mrs. Cavalossi laughed gaily.

'You have grown sentimental, Sylviane; that will pass, and in the meantime you amuse me. Well, we will leave it now. You say that Arthur is ill, and that he wants to see me; I will go to him. I expect the symptoms are chiefly in your fancy. He was perfectly well last night.'

Picking up the umbrella, Mrs. Cavalossi followed her daughter to the bedroom. She entered it smiling, the incarnation of health and spirits; it seemed impossible that any disease or weakness could exist where she was. The apartment was large, and flooded with light from a lofty window; between the window and the door was the bed upon which the invalid lay, next to the bed was a folding screen. Mrs. Cavalossi saw at once that Arthur was really ill. In her time she had had some curiously wide experiences of all sorts of illness. The young man looked exhausted; the whites of his eyes were pink, and the

eyes ran with water; he was flushed, his hair was damp, and a slight rash had broken out on his face.

He smiled feebly in response to Mrs. Cavalossi's greeting—a greeting full of tact and cheerfulness. Placing her umbrella at the foot of the bed, and absently touching her straw hat to assure herself that it had the correct poise, she came to his side. Sylviane stood behind.

The invalid made a furtive sign in the direction of his wife.

'Arthur,' said Mrs. Cavalossi, without a second's hesitation, 'I will take your temperature. Sylvie, run and ask Adela to get a clinical thermometer.'

'Now,' she hurriedly whispered, when Sylviane had gone, 'what is it, my dearest Arthur?'

'I've got influenza,' he replied. 'It will be serious; last year and the year before I nearly died from it. Get a doctor at once. I want you to keep Sylviane from being frightened; reassure her—tell her it's nothing.'

'I understand,' said Mrs. Cavalossi, with soothing tenderness, 'I understand. I will see

to everything; you've no idea what a nurse I am. I knew instantly that it was influenza, but there's no reason to consider it serious; the strictest care is all that is necessary. You couldn't have been properly looked after in your previous attacks; in a week you will be perfectly well. I wonder how you could have caught it.'

'I can't guess,' he murmured; 'I think I must carry the germs about with me, and they blossom into life when summer comes.'

Mrs. Cavalossi smiled benignly, as at a spoiled child.

'It is more probable,' she said, 'that you have brought it on by being out last night. The English climate is never safe after dark, my poor Arthur. By the way, why did you go out last night so suddenly?'

'I wanted a walk with Sylvie.'

'You are frightfully fond of her, aren't you?'

'I love her,' he said quietly.

'And you don't like your old mother-in-law because she crossed you yesterday evening? That's it, isn't it? Naughty Arthur!'

His lips relaxed into a vague smile.

'Don't forget about Sylviane,' he said insistently.

'Rely on me, Arthur,' said Mrs. Cavalossi.

'Mamma,' said Sylviane, following her mother out of the room after Mrs. Cavalossi had duly taken Arthur's temperature and despatched Sims himself for a doctor, 'I'm so frightened. I——'

And then her voice broke.

'It's like fate,' the girl said between her smothered sobs.

'Sylviane, what in heaven's name is the matter?'

'Don't you remember—— two years ago?'

The young wife looked straight in front of her with staring eyes, suddenly dry. It was the tragic corpse of her first husband which these eyes saw in the blackness of space.

'Can it be fate?' she murmured again.

'Hush!' said Mrs. Cavalossi, 'he will hear you. Come to my room for a few minutes. I will give you some brandy; you must control yourself. Arthur will be quite recovered in a day or two. What is an attack of influenza?'

And afterwards, when Sylviane had regained her composure and gone back to sit with her husband till the doctor came, Mrs. Cavalossi gazed into her looking-glass and deliberately smiled.

'Yes,' she said, 'what is an attack of influenza? The strictest care——'

She was interrupted by the entrance of Adela bearing a card.

'A gentleman to see Mr. Forrest, madam, so I brought the card to you.'

Mrs. Cavalossi inspected the white pasteboard. It showed the name, 'Arthur Peterson.'

'I think I will see him myself, Adela.' Then she hesitated. 'No,' she said at length, 'tell Mr. Peterson that Mr. Forrest is ill in bed with an attack of influenza that has come on quite suddenly, and that a doctor has just been sent for.'

'Yes, madam. And if he asks to see you?'

'He doesn't know me.'

'I beg pardon, madam,' and Adela departed.

'I would give my ears to have fifteen minutes with this Peterson person,' Mrs. Cavalossi mused when she was alone again; 'but

to make his acquaintance now might complicate matters.'

When the doctor arrived it was Mrs. Cavalossi herself who received him, and though Sylviane followed the pair into Arthur's room, she occupied an entirely secondary position in the conference. The doctor's manner was ingratiating, reassuring. There are two kinds of doctors—those who assume that you will die until their unparalleled efforts have so unmistakably succeeded that you can eat a beefsteak for breakfast, and those who assume that you are perfectly well until you are dead. The Folkestone doctor belonged to the second variety. Experience had taught him much, and amongst other things that if doctors were only called in when they were really needed about five-sixths of the profession would be compelled to turn grocers or politicians. At first he did not regard Arthur's case as in the least serious. But then it is necessary to remember that he had previously been under the spell of Mrs. Cavalossi in Mrs. Cavalossi's drawing-room; he had been warned that Sylvie's fears must not be aroused.

'H'm!' he muttered, after having taken

Arthur's pulse, and used again Mrs. Cavalossi's clinical thermometer. 'H'm!' Then a pause. Then: 'Influenza undoubtedly; a slight attack. No cause whatever for alarm, madam.' He looked at Sylviane and smiled.

'Didn't I say so, my love?' Mrs. Cavalossi remarked to her daughter.

'I will send some medicine round at once.'

'And I should like you to call again this afternoon,' said Sylvie, venturing at last to assert her rights as a wife.

'Will that really be necessary?' asked Mrs. Cavalossi.

'I will call by all means,' said the doctor shortly, after he had examined the patient again.

Mrs. Cavalossi herself accompanied him to the precincts of the hotel.

Then she went for her morning walk on the sea front; Mrs. Cavalossi had a habit of taking exercise whatever happened. It is possible that this habit explained her complexion and her redundant health.

It was still somewhat early, and the major part of the pleasure-seekers of Folkestone had not yet greeted the sun and the sea. The Leas

were but sparsely dotted with people ; the band had not commenced the day's labours. Mrs. Cavalossi took a chair, paid a penny for it, and began to meditate upon things in general. Her meditations must have been rhythmic, for she tapped her incomparable foot upon the ground at irregular intervals as though playing a tune. Suddenly her thoughts were interrupted. A young man, walking past her, had deliberately stopped in mid-career, and stood facing her.

'Excuse me,' said this young man, 'but I believe you to be Mrs. Cavalossi.'

'My name is Cavalossi,' she admitted, smiling in spite of herself.

The young man was a beautiful young man. At any rate he seemed so in that morning light, dressed as he was from head to foot in white. He showed his excellent teeth, and swung a rather knobby stick with an air of perfect ease and assurance.

'And mine is Peterson—Arthur Peterson,' he said ; 'I have just left my card on my friend Forrest at your hotel. I hope he is not seriously unwell.'

'I hope not,' said Mrs. Cavalossi. 'We

must hope it is nothing; but with influenza, you know, there is no certainty.'

'Arthur ought to know what influenza is by this time,' said Mr. Peterson.

'Yes; he told me that he had had one or two severe attacks before.'

'Severe!' said Mr. Peterson, 'severe ain't the word.'

Mrs. Cavalossi raised her eyebrows.

'I have called in the doctor; everything is being done. I am just taking the air for half an hour or so, then I shall assume a share in the nursing of your friend, Mr. Peterson.'

'You will?' he exclaimed; 'if I were ill I should like to be nursed by you.'

'Why do you say that?'

'Because you're so awfully pretty.'

The compliment was paid in the most innocent and youthful way in the world; but still it was not precisely the kind of speech that a man, even a young man, should make to a woman to whom he is a complete stranger—to whom he has not even been formally introduced. Mrs. Cavalossi found pleasure in this honest enthusiasm; but, nevertheless, she

felt it incumbent upon her to say something in the nature of a rebuff.

'You are singularly candid, Mr. Peterson,' she remarked.

'Oh, dear!' he exclaimed, crestfallen; 'have I been rude? I hope not. Anyhow, I apologise. You see, I'm not used to the society of women. I'm always putting my foot in it. But you are awfully pretty, you know, Mrs. Cavalossi. May I take this chair beside you?'

Without waiting for permission, he plumped down in the chair, leaned forward, pushed his hat back, and twiddled his stick between his knees.

'I must be going directly,' said Mrs. Cavalossi; only her manner distinguished the speech from that of a shop-girl. 'Pray, how did you know who I was?'

'I met Arthur on the steamer yesterday, and I saw him leave the boat with a lady on his arm who I knew must be his wife. Unfortunately I had not the pleasure of meeting her. That lady was the image of yourself, and since Arthur had told me about you both, I guessed at once who you were when I saw you sitting here.'

'I see,' said Mrs. Cavalossi.

'I hope you didn't mind me introducing myself to you; I only wanted to know about Forrest.'

'Not at all, Mr. Peterson; I think you will find,' she added, 'that no one will object to meeting a young man as rich as you are going to be.'

He reddened.

'Then you have heard about my father's will, and all that?'

'Oh, yes,' she said, 'of course. Who has not? You will be in all the halfpenny papers shortly—that is to say, when you come of age.'

'I trust not,' he said.

'Worse things might befall you than that.'

'For instance?'

'I will not give any examples; but I am a prophetess in a small way, Mr. Peterson.'

'Look at my hands, then.' He held them out eagerly, and she pretended to examine them.

'The line of life is long,' she said.

'Is it?' he exclaimed; 'that's good. I had my fortune told a year or two ago by a

gipsy on Epsom Downs, and she said the life line was very short.'

Mrs. Cavalossi glanced up at the youth suddenly.

'Very short?' she questioned with sharpness.

'Yes.'

'Gipsies are such frauds,' she said; 'never believe them. The life-line is long. But—let me warn you against calamity.'

'What sort of calamity?'

'Nay, how can I tell?'

'You are teasing me,' he said. 'I don't really believe you know anything about palmistry at all, Mrs. Cavalossi.'

'Infidel!' she smiled at him, imperturbed; 'you will see. Good morning!'

'May I not walk with you to your hotel?' he begged.

'I could not think of troubling you, Mr. Peterson,' she said coldly.

'It wouldn't be a trouble,' he urged.

'Good morning,' she said, and left him without shaking hands.

'Curious woman!' he murmured, when he was alone. 'But she's a clipper all the same

I'll call at that hotel twice a day till Forrest gets better—dashed if I won't!'

Then he went off in the direction of the men's bathing ground. Pathetic figure, unconscious of his pathos! Fate was weaving her web round him and round his millions.

Mrs. Cavalossi bit her lip as she re-entered the Pavilion Hotel. She was wondering whether she had behaved with complete discretion during this somewhat amusing interview with Arthur Peterson. She comforted herself with the thought that, anyhow, the interview had been forced upon her by circumstance; she had not sought it. She quite expected that the exuberant and youthful Peterson would call at the hotel, but she decided that she would not see him. And the fact indeed was that these two—so apart yet so intimately connected—never saw each other again. Their orbits touched just that once, lightly, momentarily; they exchanged five minutes of the airiest of talk—and parted for eternity. In such chance meetings there is an element of the incomprehensible, the disconcerting, the supremely poignant.

CHAPTER VIII

THE INVITATION TO THE ANGEL OF DEATH

In the meantime the course of Arthur Forrest's illness was proving that he had not been mistaken in diagnosing his own case. By the afternoon of that day he was seriously ill, and every one in the hotel knew that he was seriously ill. The manager went about with the look of a martyr, having a natural professional antipathy to all varieties of illness, and more particularly to those of an infectious nature—hotel guests are so exacting, so nervous, so timid. However, nothing could be done beyond maintaining a strict silence on the subject.

This extraordinary disease, though it is probably scores of centuries old, made its first appearance in modern times scarcely a dozen years ago. Since 1889 it has assumed widely different forms—forms alike only in the degrees of their fatality. It has carried off thousands

of lives, and it has vanquished the efforts of science to ascertain its nature and causes. One of the most mysterious of modern epidemics, its manifestations are often so disguised that its presence can only be detected by after-effects. At the best its symptoms are trifling, and it is the very slightness of these symptoms which, by leading the patient to minimise their importance, so materially assists the disease in its deadly work. Its cure has yet to be invented; as things stand at present, the best that the best doctor can do is to order the sufferer to be kept warm in bed and supplied with suitable liquid.

At the end of the second day Arthur's position was critical. His temperature was 104 degrees. Stimulants seemed to have no effect upon him; he was frequently delirious, and his hold upon existence had obviously grown weaker. Mrs. Cavalossi had, with Sylviane's entire concurrence, decided against having a nurse. The two women told the doctor that they preferred to nurse Arthur themselves. On the previous night Sylviane had sat up with her husband, Adela being within call; to-night Mrs. Cavalossi was going to sit up.

It was ten o'clock, and the doctor was just concluding his visit. Sylviane had, upon absolute compulsion, retired to her mother's room for a few hours' rest.

'He is, perhaps, the least bit in the world better,' said the doctor to Mrs. Cavalossi, taking up his hat. 'But the fever seems obstinate. I may as well tell you frankly, now that Mrs. Forrest is not here, that the case is still as serious as it could be. I think you should have a professional nurse, though you, Mrs. Cavalossi, are faultless in that respect. It is Mrs. Forrest that I fear; she is too anxious and excitable to nurse well.'

'As you wish, doctor,' said Mrs. Cavalossi submissively; 'I will obtain a nurse early to-morrow.'

'You mentioned that you happened to have a friend in London who was an eminent physician. May I suggest that you telegraph for him?'

'I have already done so,' said Mrs. Cavalossi; 'I thought you would not mind. He will, I hope, be here early to-morrow.'

The doctor bowed.

'I need not enjoin on you the most scru-

pulous care,' said the doctor in parting; 'the least temporary failure in watchfulness might have a disastrous result. Good night; I shall call to-morrow morning immediately after breakfast.'

Mrs. Cavalossi and the patient were alone in the large bedroom, lighted by a single electric light over the dressing-table. She closed the door softly; yes, she was alone with him. All had gone well; all had fallen out as she had intended. The course was clear, the action safe, simple, perfect. She walked towards the bed, and the soft swish of her delicate grey gown disturbed the silence of the apartment. She looked down—she, with the flashing eye and the hue of health—she looked down upon this sufferer stretched so suddenly under the fell stroke of unexpected disease. She smiled with the cold glittering joy of one who has no scruples, no hesitation—nothing but desire to be gratified. Arthur lay half-unconscious, moaning now and then, and now and then dropping off into a brief sleep; here, helpless, feeble, flickering, was the man who had dared by his obstinacy to check the most magnificent scheme of her career! It was too

funny—too excruciatingly funny! Forty-eight hours ago he had withstood her with all the resolution of youth and strength. Now—now he was a candle. Poof! and the flame would be gone, never to be rekindled.

Arthur opened his eyes and made some faint sign.

'Thirsty?' she queried, gently; 'I must give you your medicine.'

With adroit movements she took the bottle from the night-table, poured out the dose, and put the glass to his lips, supporting his head as he drank it off.

'Sylvie?' he murmured.

'She is resting awhile,' said Mrs. Cavalossi. 'The poor thing was dreadfully tired. Now you must rest, too; you must try to go to sleep.'

She passed a cool, firm hand across his wet forehead. The throb of his agony communicated itself to her. She smiled again imperceptibly as it occurred to her with renewed force how ill the man was.

Then he slept, unconscious of the sinister forces arrayed against him.

Mrs. Cavalossi went and sat by the fire at

the other end of the room. Although it was August, there had been a sudden change in the weather, and the doctor had laid down the strictest injunction that the temperature of the sick chamber should be kept absolutely level at 63 degrees.

Perhaps half an hour elapsed in oppressive silence. At length Mrs. Cavalossi went to the door and listened intently. Not a sound anywhere, save Arthur's heavy breathing. She looked at him again: the sweat stood in beads on his brow, but he was indubitably asleep.

The moment had come.

With exquisite lightness of touch she carefully drew down the bedclothes till his shoulders and chest were exposed. He slept on. She went to the window, pulled the blind aside. It was raining, and the sky was torn and grey with ragged, racing clouds; she fancied she could hear the dull surge of the sea.

She turned round abruptly, and, after listening again, moved the great screen that stood between the window and the bed. Then she felt for the catch of the window; fortunately it was undone. With a happy, deliberate sigh she noiselessly pushed up the window inch by

inch—inch by inch—till it stood open over a foot. The cold air of a rainy night wandered into the room—even she shivered at its contact. It blew across the intervening space and disturbed the damp locks of the sick man.

He slept on, unaware that the shaft of death had struck him.

All over his head and shoulders played the air which had swept across leagues of ocean, through leagues of rain—the pure atmosphere to breathe which the inhabitants of cities will travel hundreds of miles; but to Arthur it was death.

Mrs. Cavalossi perched herself on the window-sill and watched calmly. There were chances against her even now, but she accepted them. If he awoke! He stirred once, but she never stirred. Twenty minutes passed; then, just as softly as she had opened it, she closed the window.

'The most scrupulous care!' she murmured, mimicking the doctor.

At that very instant, waking up, Arthur spoke. She approached the bed.

'You mustn't disturb the clothes, Arthur dear,' she said, and gently raised them again

round his shoulders. 'Will you have some lemonade?'

'I'm worse,' he said, after he had drunk. 'I can feel it all through my body; I'm worse than I was an hour ago.'

'No, no, you are better really. People always feel worse in the night.'

'Is the fire burning?' he asked.

'Yes, it's a beautiful fire,' she answered.

'I'm chilled to the bone,' he said; and then put his flushed face meekly down upon the pillow.

Mrs. Cavalossi, with a silent movement, seized the screen and pulled it back to its place. As she did so it slipped, and would have fallen against the window had she not caught it in time. With a little exclamation of annoyance she lifted it upright. All was well. A creak startled her; her eyes travelled like lightning to the door.

'Sylviane!' she whispered hoarsely.

The girl stood there with wide, frightened eyes, and outstretched right hand, her white dressing-gown clutched to her with the left.

'What is it, Sylviane?' said Mrs. Cavalossi calmly.

'I dreamt he was dying, and so I came. What were you doing with that screen, mother?'

'I accidentally nearly knocked it over; but you must really go back to bed, Sylvie.'

'Mother,' she entreated, and came near the bed.

They stood on opposite sides, mother and the daughter, and the sick man between them.

'He *is* worse,' said Sylviane, in a breathless whisper.

'My dear girl,' said Mrs. Cavalossi, leading her daughter away from the bedside, 'you must try to keep calm. Personally, I do not think he is any worse; but he is certainly not any better. No one can fight against fate. We have done all that could be done, and we must hope that he will recover.'

Sylviane started away from her mother's caress.

'Why did you force me to go to bed?' she cried under her breath.

'You needed rest, my dear girl,' Mrs. Cavalossi answered imperturbably.

'Why wouldn't you let me stay up and nurse him to the last?' Sylviane cried out again

in the same accents, ignoring her mother's answer.

'Don't get hysterical, Sylviane,' said the mother.

'You seem to have forgotten that I am his wife. Oh! if I had stayed up I should not have dreamt—I should not have dreamt——'

'What?'

'That dream, that dream! Mother,' she continued quickly, 'is the window shut?'

'Of course it is shut, my dear silly girl; I have been most particular. Now, if you are ready to take your turn in here, go and dress.'

There was a discreet tap at the door, and Adela entered. The clock in the corridor struck eleven. Catching her mistress's eye, Adela beckoned, and Mrs. Cavalossi left the room. Husband and wife were alone.

'Dr. Colpus is here, madam,' said Adela to her mistress in the corridor.

'Dr. Colpus?'

'Yes, madam; he has just arrived by the mail.'

'My dream!' exclaimed Sylviane, and fell into a chair sobbing.

The sick man stirred on the bed, and Sylviane ran to him. Mrs. Cavalossi gave a few brief orders to the tireless and invaluable Adela, who seemed never to take or to need rest.

CHAPTER IX

'SPILT MILK'

MRS. CAVALOSSI hurried to the drawing-room. Dr. Colpus was removing his gloves.

'I wired you to come to-morrow,' she began, with some sign of vexation.

'I preferred to come at once,' said Dr. Colpus; 'the case seemed serious.'

'It is no longer serious,' she said, lightly, having shut the door; 'it is decided.'

'He is better?'

'He is dying—he cannot recover.'

Something peculiar in the woman's voice arrested his attention.

'What have you done?' he asked her, peremptorily. 'What is this game you are playing down here all alone?'

'The local doctor'—she answered, with composure—'the local doctor said that any change of temperature would be fatal. So I opened the window for half an hour while he

was asleep—it seemed to me much the best thing to do. It is over now, and it serves him right; people so stupid as he is have no right to live. When he is out of the way we can prove his relationship to Peterson, and there will be no further bother. He has made his will, as we know, and everything will be Sylviane's; therefore, everything will be mine. Confess that I have arranged it neatly, and—kiss me.'

Dr. Colpus sank into a chair, ignoring the invitation of her rosy mouth.

'Marie!' he gasped. His face flushed purple, then white. Then, with a tremendous effort, he pulled himself together.

'Are you indisposed?' she asked icily.

'No,' he replied, and as he spoke he sat bolt upright in the chair, and burst out laughing. 'You are too much for me,' he added.

'Why?' she queried with an air of innocence.

'The audacity of trying that trick on again!'

'What trick?'

'The open window trick, you infernal witch!'

'May I ask you to explain exactly what you mean?'

'Did not the late Signor Gabriele Cavalossi die of an open window, when he was suffering from an attack of bronchitis? And was not the window opened by his wife?'

She gazed at him in silence.

'You thought no one knew the cause of Cavalossi's death. But I knew; and, what is more, I was told by some one, a mere servant, who saw the trick done from the outside of the palazzo.'

'Giovanni, the cowherd?' she questioned.

'The same.'

'But Giovanni is dead,' she said, and laughed easily.

'Yes; but who knows that Giovanni did not tell some one else before he died—some one less discreet and loyal than me?'

'Bah!' said Mrs. Cavalossi; and she approached Dr. Colpus and kissed him. 'Thank heaven we are neither of us sentimentalists.'

This singular couple, united equally by crime and an intense passion—this couple whose wickedness was so cold, reasoned, and sincere, that it is impossible to be altogether angry

with them as one would be angry with sinners who tried to gloss over their sins by specious argument—this couple remained hand in hand and silent for the space of about a minute.

'A penny for your thoughts!' said Mrs. Cavalossi to her betrothed, who was gazing at her.

He started, as though awakened swiftly to the realities of the present, and cleared his throat.

'Marie, if he dies, all is lost; that is why I hurried down.'

'Lost!' she repeated, frowning. 'But you positively assured me that the claim was perfectly clear!'

'So it is, if Forrest is alive to make the claim. But if he is dead, how shall we prove his identity, on which everything depends? There will have to be exhumation—a thousand things. It couldn't be done. The question would be too awkward, Marie.' There was a mild reproach in his tone. 'You seem determined to ruin us. Do you not recollect that at our memorable little dinner party, the other evening, Arthur Forrest told you very plainly that no claim could be substantiated without

his personal assistance? Arthur Forrest happened to be perfectly correct in that statement.'

She sat down, cowed. There was silence. She could think of nothing to say. Her heart was bursting with sullen, futile anger.

'I thought he was merely boasting,' she murmured.

'Forrest is a sort of man that never boasts, and that never says anything without good grounds.'

'Well,' she said, 'it's no use crying over spilt milk.'

Never in the whole of her life did Mrs. Cavalossi use a phrase more thoroughly characteristic of her than this one—'It's no use crying over spilt milk.' She was a criminal, utterly vicious; but there was a strain of Napoleonic grandeur in her composition.

'It should have occurred to you,' Dr. Colpus said at length, 'that of the two Arthurs the other Arthur was more in the way.' He smiled calmly.

'*The other Arthur?*' she repeated after him.

'Yes.'

'Ah!' Mrs. Cavalossi uttered the mono-

syllable as though she had been struck by a sudden arrow of light. There was a pause.

'He is a nice boy—the other Arthur,' she said.

'How do you know—have you met him?'

'He introduced himself to me the other morning. He was deliciously impertinent and boyish; but I think there is something more in him than mere impertinence and boyishness. However—— Well, what are you going to do? It's all over with my respected son-in-law.'

'I will see your son-in-law at once,' said Dr. Colpus, starting up.

'I tell you it is useless,' she said, bitterly; 'I have made too sure—there is no hope.'

'There is always hope. I will save him. Yes, there is always hope,' he repeated.

'Not when I have been at work,' she said.

The doctor seemed to recoil from those terrible words, but only for an instant.

'Take me to him,' he said; 'I will save him.'

PART II

CHAPTER X

THE OTHER ARTHUR

Arthur Peterson, the young man whom Forrest had met on the Boulogne steamer, and who had so outrageously tried to flirt with Mrs. Cavalossi on Folkestone Leas, sat in the library at Radway Grange. Let it be said that the library was not a library, and the Grange not a grange. The library happened to be a rather large room fitted up with two desks, a number of pigeon-holes, and some tin boxes—there were a few volumes in a dwarf bookcase; but these comprised only such literature as local directories, the ' Post Office Guide,' joint-stock year-books, some works on coal mining, and a ready reckoner. The late owner of the Grange, Arthur Peterson's father, had been by no means of a bookish disposition. As for the Grange, it was an early Victorian erection in the Palladian

style, and with its stucco front and stiff portico it bore about as much resemblance to a grange as a railway station bears to a cathedral. Nevertheless it was of respectable size, containing some fifty rooms, and it had always been called the Grange. It might have been kept up handsomely on an income of three thousand a year. The late owner had sixty times that income, yet the place satisfied him. He had not even kept it up handsomely ; he had merely kept it up, being a person in no way prone to domestic extravagances. It stood, roughly speaking, halfway between Crewe and that immense industrial district called the Five Towns. It was in Staffordshire, but had it been a quarter of a mile to the north-west it would have been in Cheshire. Radway Green was the nearest village, and Turnhill the nearest town ; but Crewe, owing to its position on the main line of the London and North-Western Railway, was regarded by Radway Grange as the most convenient point for reaching civilisation, though it was seven full miles off. The Grange lay in a hollow. Just behind it rose a hill, and from this on clear days and nights you could see the smoke and flame of the Five

Towns, out of whose mines and ironworks old Peterson, the millionaire, had made his millions.

Old Peterson, the millionaire, had gone to his own place, and the whole of the district, including the Five Towns, was wondering what sort of a figure young Peterson, the new millionaire, was about to cut in local life, social and political. The district had both loved and feared old Peterson—it loved him because he would never 'stand any nonsense;' and, curiously enough, it feared him precisely for the same reason. This is human nature. Old Peterson had taken no interest whatever in local life; he had extracted his vast profits from the bowels of the earth, and he had paid wages every Saturday morning with the exactitude of a chronometer and the niggardliness of a government department—and that was all. He had never desired to represent the division in the House of Commons, or to bully the county council, or to pose as a benefactor, a philanthropist, or a faddist. He had posed merely as what he was—a millionaire and an employer of labour. There had been only one strike at the Peterson works: that strike had lasted forty-two weeks; during it many children

had died of starvation, several mothers had been convicted of theft, and sundry attempts had been made to shoot old Peterson, the millionaire. But in the end old Peterson had won. The men 'went in' unconditionally, beaten and cowed. Whereupon, having thus established his triumph, old Peterson had calmly granted the rise in wages which the men had originally struck for. This incident transformed Peterson into a public character. His name went round the world in sensational newspaper paragraphs, and came back again *viâ* New York embroidered with a thousand impossible legends.

It was stated in the neighbourhood that old Peterson was very harsh to his wife, Lady Evelyn. Certainly, when she drove into the Five Towns behind her costly and dangerous horses, she had the sad look of a queen who has lived too long. She was a fragile flower, and Peterson knew nothing and cared less about the proper way to treat fragile flowers. But, at any rate, he never stooped so low as to keep her short of money. Money in plenty she had, as befitted an earl's daughter. One day she died—Arthur was fourteen then. She

just died ; and it was reported that old Peterson, on hearing the news in his office, exclaimed: 'H'm!' and went on dictating a letter. Probably this tale is not entirely accurate ; but it is a fair sample of the stories which were afloat concerning old Peterson.

It cannot be wondered at, therefore, that young Arthur's advent in the district as master and millionaire created a flutter of anticipation. Arthur, fortunately or unfortunately, was unaware of this flutter. He had no interest in industrial affairs ; in fact, he did not quite know where he stood. He was younger than his age, and, though endowed with a mind powerful and obstinate in some directions, he had peculiarities, and he had by no means yet 'found himself.'

It was afternoon, and the December light was fading. He sat in a worn armchair—apparently he was doing nothing ; as a matter of fact, he was very busy getting used to the idea of riches. He had now been in possession of Radway Grange, and in nominal possession of his father's fortune, for about a couple of months. It was a complicated business, he found, entering into an inheritance so

vast as his. He had seen his solicitor, Mr. Thrush, who was also the trustee of his father's will, many times; but up to now there had been no big interview, no crucial conversation, at which affairs should be settled in huge lumps, as it were, and mighty, far-reaching instructions given and received. Both solicitor and client had been occupied with innumerable details—absurd details which refused to be put on one side. These details had at last been disposed of, and the great final interview was, in fact, to take place that afternoon; Arthur Peterson was even now expecting Mr. Thrush to arrive from Manchester.

He looked at his watch; it was half-past three. At that moment a servant entered.

'Mr. Thrush, sir, and this letter.'

Peterson took the letter, and, observing the handwriting, opened it with eagerness and began to read. The missive ran:—

'London: *December* 15.

'My dear Arthur,—Renewed thanks for your constant inquiries. After an infernally long bout I am now perfectly convalescent; people tell me now that it was a miracle I recovered at all. Old Colpus, of whom you

have heard, and who, by the way, has married my esteemed mater-in-law, did the trick, and of course I'm awfully grateful to him. Well, I am writing to say that Sylviane and I can now accept your invitation. Please expect us on Friday afternoon next, the 18th, unless that will be inconvenient to you. The train gets to Crewe at 4.30 P.M., and we trust you will meet us yourself or send some one. Sylviane is a bit out of health, or rather out of spirits; I guess my illness has been too much of a strain on her. She is anxious to make your acquaintance. *Au revoir* till Friday.—Yours ever,

'ARTHUR C. FORREST.

'P.S.—Try not to be too magnificent with your millions; remember I am a simple sort of person, and that in the days when we chummed you yourself were fairly simple too.

'A. C. F.'

Peterson smiled absently as he finished the letter, and then perceived that the servant was waiting.

'Oh,' he said, 'show Mr. Thrush up here, and bring a couple of lamps and some tea.'

The only thing distinctively legal about the external aspect of Mr. Thrush, the eminent Manchester solicitor, was his small brown bag, which seemed to be part of him when he was on a journey; otherwise he resembled a country gentleman of outdoor tendencies. He wore a bowler hat, a blue suit, and a pink necktie; he was clean-shaven, and had a full, rather square countenance; his age was fifty-five, and he looked forty-five. No cleverer or more experienced lawyer than Mr. Thrush existed in the Midlands.

'I shall have just an hour and a quarter here,' he said to Peterson, after they had drunk tea and chatted. 'I have to go to Derby. Shall we start on our business now, and discuss the weather afterwards—if we have time?' He smiled humorously.

Peterson nodded. Peterson, though the master of millions, still had the look of a boy, with his round smooth face and rather short stature.

'You said in your last letter that you wished to ask me some questions; what are they?' said Mr. Thrush.

'Well,' Peterson began, clearing his throat,

'I want to know exactly what I own, and what it is worth, and what it brings in; I am not yet clear on these points. You handed me a sum of thirty-five thousand pounds in cash two months ago, Mr. Thrush. It may interest you to learn that I have spent a good bit of that.'

'Not on the Grange,' said Mr. Thrush, laughing, and looking round at the bare room.

'No, I am not sufficiently interested in *this* Grange; but, as you know, I am building another one.'

'Which will entail a larger outlay?'

'Exactly.'

'I have heard that architecture is your hobby,' said Mr. Thrush.

'My hobby?'

'Your speciality, let us say.'

'Who told you that?'

'One of my clerks, who took his holiday in Italy this last summer, and saw you making drawings of the Certosa of Pavia.'

'Ah, yes!' said Arthur Peterson, and then added, as if faintly annoyed, 'it appears, then, that my goings-on are discussed even in Manchester; I had no idea I was so important a personage.'

Nothing about him was more striking than the change in his demeanour since he had begun to handle his inheritance. His looks were still boyish, but at times there came over him an air of weariness, of pettishness, which suited ill that countenance normally so fresh and open.

'Of course, you are a public character,' said Mr. Thrush, 'and, as such, your doings will be discussed—I hope always with respectful friendliness.'

Arthur's interest in architecture was perfectly genuine. He was singularly lacking in tastes, predilections; but he did sincerely feel an attraction towards the subject of architecture. Hence the Palladian ugliness of Radway Grange had annoyed him since the very earliest of his years of discretion, and it had long been his design to build a more beautiful house on a better site. With a wild energy which disclosed at once the strength and weaknesses of his character, he had commenced operations immediately upon his succession to the estate; and several months before this he had employed a young architect, whom he believed to be a genius, to create the new abode.

'Yes,' Arthur said absently, 'my new Grange will be the finest private house in the county.'

'Delighted to hear it,' said Mr. Thrush with formal politeness.

'But you don't think it will, all the same,' said Arthur.

'I hope it will, Mr. Peterson; but I am no authority on architecture, and shall not presume to judge. By the way, what shall you do with the present house?—a commodious residence, my dear sir.'

'I shall pull the d——d thing down,' Arthur exclaimed, with apparently causeless fury. 'It's ugliness is enough to give you the measles.'

'Tut-tut; you are exigent, my friend—your travels have made you over-critical.'

'Well, at any rate, I will give this talkative county something to talk about with my new house. And now, to return, Mr. Thrush; how much will the owner of this new house have to spend?'

'Listen,' said Mr. Thrush, taking up a paper. 'This is a list of your possessions. First, you have six thousand shares of a

hundred pounds each in the Peterson Collieries and Ironworks, Limited. These bring in an income of a hundred and fifty thousand a year, and they are worth, at current prices, about one million eight hundred thousand pounds.'

'Excellent,' said Peterson dryly.

'Then you have four hundred thousand pounds' worth of London and North-Western Railway stock, of which company you are the third largest shareholder. This brings in sixteen thousand a year.'

'Good,' said Peterson.

'Then you have two hundred and twenty thousand and five hundred pounds in Consols, bringing in six thousand a year.'

'We are descending to trifles,' said Peterson.

'Then you have cottage property all over the Five Towns worth fifty-two thousand pounds, and bringing in five thousand. You also have this house, and the two thousand acres of land attached—value uncertain.'

'Leave it out,' said Peterson, laconically.

'Then you have miscellaneous shares and mortgages to the tune of three hundred and thirty thousand pounds, yielding nine thousand a year. And, lastly——'

'Yes, lastly?'

'You requested me to get some cash in hand. I have done so. Lastly, you have two hundred thousand pounds on deposit, bringing in a paltry eighty pounds a week.'

'And that is all?'

'That is all.'

'Now for the total.'

'The total value, roughly speaking, is three millions one hundred and two thousand five hundred pounds.'

'Then my father's fortune has increased since his death?'

'Big fortunes have a pleasant habit of increasing automatically. Yes, it has increased by a little over three hundred thousand pounds. The amount would have been more, but death duties are now lamentably heavy.'

'And the present income?'

'The present income is, as nearly as possible, two hundred thousand a year.'

'Thanks,' said Arthur Peterson. 'Now, Mr. Thrush, I have some simple instructions for you. You are much older than me; you are also my legal adviser.'

'Let me put in,' Mr. Thrush interrupted

pleasantly, 'that you, Mr. Peterson, are my most important client, my richest client. My other clients come to see *me*; I come to see *you*.'

'I regard it as an honour,' Peterson returned, smiling. 'I was saying that you are older than me, and that you are my legal adviser. The instructions which I am about to give you will surprise you. Nevertheless, let me warn you beforehand that I do not wish to argue about them—I have made up my mind.'

'I allow nothing to surprise me,' said Mr. Thrush; 'continue.'

'My instructions are these: You will sell all my property, of whatever kind, except the consols, and you will buy consols.'

Mr. Thrush had just stated that he allowed nothing to surprise him; but, nevertheless, he now found himself in a state which, without exaggeration, might be termed a state of amazement.

'Are you mad?' he exclaimed.

No sooner had this experienced man of affairs uttered the words than he perceived that he had committed an error of discretion.

'Mad?' said Arthur Peterson. 'Oh! people say I am mad, do they? Do I look mad? Is there anything about me to suggest insanity, Mr. Thrush?'

The young man rose from his chair and walked to and fro.

'You mistake me, my dear sir,' said Mr. Thrush soothingly. 'We lawyers are prone, I am afraid, to regard any proceeding not marked by business principles as—well, as mad. I spoke only in that sense. And of course I am not so wrapped up in commercialism as to be unable to perceive that there may be other points of view than ours.'

Mr. Thrush's manner was perfect. Absolutely free from servility, it yet gave the young millionaire to understand that the old lawyer regarded him with respect.

'I should not be doing my duty towards you professionally,' the solicitor continued, 'if I did not treat such instructions as you have just given me with at least a pretence of alarm.' Here he laughed, and Arthur Peterson laughed too—loudly.

'You grasp my instructions?' said Arthur.

'Ah!' said Mr. Thrush, after a long breath.

'You are aware, Mr. Peterson, that this proceeding will reduce your income from 200,000*l.* a year to—let me see—to something under 100,000*l.* a year; that you will, therefore, be throwing away 2,000*l.* a week.'

'I am aware of it.'

'And may I ask your reasons?'

'Simply this; that I want to *enjoy* my fortune. As it is, the worry of all these various shares and securities would be the bane of my life. If my money is in consols the income may be small comparatively, but it is an income without anxiety, and beyond the schemings of the Stock Exchange.'

'That is true,' murmured Mr. Thrush.

'Moreover, I sha'n't be able to spend 100,000*l.* a year, to say nothing of 200,000*l.*'

'I see,' said Mr. Thrush; 'permit me to say that you are an original young man, Mr. Peterson.'

'Perhaps so; but I want to enjoy myself. You will carry out my instructions?'

'Am I not your solicitor? But the thing must be done delicately; I shall want time. To put your colliery shares, for instance, on the market all at once would seriously lessen

their value, while to go on to the Stock Exchange and buy 3,000,000*l.* of Consols in a lump would certainly send up the price. I shall want time, Mr. Peterson.'

'I give you six months. Will that do?'

'I will try.'

'You spoke of 200,000*l.* cash; is that at my bankers'?'

'It is.'

'Then I can draw a cheque for 25,000*l.* instantly?'

'You can.'

Arthur Peterson took his cheque book from a drawer, and, writing out a cheque for the sum he had named, handed it to Mr. Thrush.

'This is made out to me,' said the lawyer.

'It is for you.'

'But why?'

'Merely as an acknowledgment of your services, and of my appreciation of your forbearance in not arguing with me about my decision to reduce my income.'

'Really, Mr. Peterson, I cannot accept it.'

'Why not? Are you, then, so rich?'

'It is so unusual.'

'Mr. Thrush, accept the advice of a

youngster. Do not refuse that cheque; it is an expression of goodwill, and one should never despise any expression of goodwill.'

For answer Mr. Thrush shook hands with Arthur Peterson.

'You are too munificent,' he stammered, putting the cheque into his pocket-book.

In half an hour, matters of detail having been discussed, Mr. Thrush had left the Grange. He was startled, but he was also impressed by his young client.

'Devilish odd!' he murmured to himself as he got into a first-class carriage at Crewe; and again, when he changed trains at Knype, he murmured, 'Devilish odd!' And, as he left the Midland station at Derby in a Derby fly he remarked to the peculiar sliding doors of the fly: 'There's something about that young man I can't understand. I wonder, now——' But the doors heard no more; they never knew what Mr. Thrush wondered. And so Mr. Thrush passes out of the story.

CHAPTER XI

VAGARIES OF A DOG-CART AND SOME HARNESS

THE mare and the dog-cart stood waiting at the door, a groom at the mare's head.

'Everything all right?' said Arthur Peterson as he came down the steps buttoning his gloves.

'Yes, sir,' answered the groom.

'I've only left myself half an hour—will she do it?'

'Oh, yes, sir; easy, sir. I had her out yesterday morning for exercise, and she did her two mile in seven-fifty, sir. I picked up Mr.—— I forget his name—your new valet, sir. Beg pardon, sir, he seems to know a bit about horses; he said she were a treat; so she is, sir.'

'So my new valet understands horses, does he?' said Arthur Peterson with amusement, being more and more struck every day by the

omniscience of the wonderful servant recently engaged from London.

'Yes, sir, he's often in the stable, sir; seems to like it. Handy man, sir.'

'Right. You needn't come with me. Has the luggage cart started?'

'Yes, sir, half an hour since.'

'Let go.'

The black mare went off like a gun, or a stone from a catapult—exactly as a hundred-guinea mare, handled by a young man who can drive well and knows it, should go off. This mare, like a certain horse, was a noble animal, but she needed handling; with Arthur Peterson at the other end of the reins she had it.

Peterson snatched a glance at his watch as they passed the first milestone on the way to Crewe Station. Three minutes fifteen seconds for the first mile. He reflected that it was rather unceremonious for a millionaire to fetch guests from the railway station in a dog-cart unaccompanied by a groom. But he had not yet had time to grow ceremonious, and moreover he had a boyish anxiety to show off the mare to Arthur Forrest, and for this purpose

she must not be overweighted on the return journey.

'Jove! I hope the lovely Sylviane won't object to travelling in a dog-cart; never thought of that,' he murmured. Then the mare occupied him again; half a mile of straight dead-level lay before him.

'Now, Betsy,' he chirruped, and drew the whip gently over her flank.

She jumped forward, and something happened. The dog-cart was swerved askew, and the mare danced across the road. With a supreme effort he mastered her and sprang out. A trace had broken on the near side. The accident might have had serious consequences, but Peterson took it calmly enough.

A boy happened to be lounging along the road in front of him—a little boy with big feet and the gait of a decrepit cabman.

'Hi!' called Arthur.

The boy took no notice.

'Hi!' Arthur called again.

The boy turned round.

'Didst call, mester?' the boy inquired blandly, in the dialect of the district, which is

an extraordinary mixture of the dialects of Staffordshire and of Cheshire.

'Of course I called,' replied Peterson; 'don't ask silly questions. Come here, I want you.'

'See any green i' my eye?' the boy remarked.

'Come along, now; I've got a job and a sixpence for you.'

Thus cajoled, the boy came at a pace learnt in the arable clayey fields of Cheshire.

'Can you hold this mare, my lad?'

'I can hold a plough-horse,' said the boy.

'Well, catch on with both hands, and mind she doesn't run away with you.'

The boy laughed and obeyed.

Peterson bent down to take a lace from his boot; but when he perceived that he wore buttoned boots, he cursed the shoemaker at Oldcastle who had persuaded him that as a self-respecting man he must wear buttoned boots on certain occasions; Peterson, by inherited instinct, was a man who wore one pair of boots for most occasions. He looked next at the boy's boots. The boy's boots, however, were clogs—enormous shoon, in which the Old

Woman of the nursery rhyme might have brought up a family.

'What sort of laces do you wear?' he demanded of the boy.

The boy sniggered, as though Peterson had made an excellent joke.

'Leather?' asked Peterson.

'No,' said the boy.

'What, then?'

'Porpus, o' course; these are feyther's clogs, and he has a fancy for porpus.'

'Good,' said Peterson, 'take off the right boot; that seems to have the best lace.'

'Dost see any green i' my eye, mester?' the boy once more asked.

Peterson boxed his ears, which disquieted the mare, and the mare had to be soothed. Time was flying.

'Here's half a crown for you,' said Peterson.

'Hafe a crahn's better than a scuft in th' earhole any day,' said the boy with precocious philosophy; and he removed his boot while Peterson held the mare.

'Thanks,' said Peterson.

'Thank *yo*',' said the boy, as he put on the clog again, laceless.

'That's the worst of new harness,' Peterson said to himself. In five minutes, with the aid of a penknife and the porpoise boot-lace, he had mended the fracture.

'Gently now, Betsy!' he instructed the mare, and they did the next four miles at a pace not exceeding thirteen miles an hour. Then occurred a stiff rise of half a mile or so before the descent into Crewe. The mare took this well, and was just enlivening herself at the top of the slope, when she shied at a heap of stones by the roadside. She zigzagged at an angle of forty degrees, her ears and tail restless. The next moment there was a sudden noise—half a crunch, half a shriek—at Peterson's left hand. He looked round and saw the near wheel waggling. In a fraction of a second he had jumped out, the reins in his hand. At the same instant the wheel detached itself from the vehicle, ran a yard or two, and fell over; the cart dropped with a thud.

'Great Scott!' he ejaculated; 'what next?' But he had the mare firmly by the head, and though she struggled to get free of the twisted shafts she could do nothing.

'Steady, mare!' he coaxed her. 'You

won't reach Crewe this afternoon; but I shall.'

He did in fact, reach Crewe, and only a quarter of an hour after time; happily the train was twenty minutes late. As he drove home with Arthur and Sylviane along the dark lanes in a landau hired from the Crewe Arms, he recounted in a nonchalant manner, which did him much credit, how in the gathering dusk he had got the mare out of the shafts, led her to the stable of a wayside inn close by, sent a couple of men to remove the damaged dog-cart, and then done the mile and a half into Crewe at the double.

'That explains why I was breathless when you first saw me, Mrs. Forrest,' he said to Sylviane, who sat opposite to him in the carriage.

She smiled gently; he noticed that she seemed steeped in melancholy, while her husband was in admirable spirits.

'You always could manage a horse, Peterson,' said Forrest, quietly, proud of his friend.

'It was about the tightest fix I've been in,' Peterson answered him.

'It seems strange that two accidents should

occur on one journey,' Sylviane said, looking at Peterson.

'Very ; but I have known a wheel to come off before, and I have known a trace to break before ; the two things merely happened together, that's all.'

'But sha'n't you hold an inquiry among the stable hands?' she pursued.

'I shall make a row,' he said, 'if that's what you mean,' and he laughed.

'So long as the mare is all right, the bold youth cares not,' said Arthur Forrest.

But Sylviane would not respond to the mood of the two men.

'I have always been afraid of dog-carts and of fast-trotting mares,' she said, seriously, 'they make me shiver.'

'Then I'm glad that wheel came off,' said Peterson, quietly and positively.

'Why?'

'Because if it hadn't you would have been in the dog-cart and behind that precious mare, instead of in this landau and behind the weird quadruped which the driver has the audacity to describe as a horse.' He was trying to show his wit to the fair creature.

'With you I should not have been afraid.'

'You wouldn't? Why?'

'I don't know; but I shouldn't.'

She gave him a look of confidence which enchanted him. His friend's wife had, in truth, made a profound impression upon his youthful and somewhat mercurial temperament. And, indeed, Sylviane was more beautiful than ever. The anxieties through which she had recently passed in connection with her husband's illness—of whose seriousness neither himself nor Peterson had any adequate conception—seemed to have added to her face a certain wistful and nun-like attraction—final touch of the divine.

When at length the funereal trot of the hired horse ended at the front door of the Grange, and the housekeeper had taken Sylviane to her room, Peterson dragged Arthur Forrest for a few moments into his study, which was also a smoking-room.

'I say, old man,' he blurted out; 'I can't help telling you—she's absolutely magnificent. She's an angel, and a deuced sight too good for you.'

'I'm glad you like her,' said Arthur Forrest, simply. 'She has taken to you.'

'Think so?'

Forrest nodded, while Peterson almost blushed.

'I was immensely struck by your mother-in-law,' said Arthur Peterson; 'but your wife outshines her as the sun outshines the moon.'

'Don't wax poetical, my youth,' said Forrest; 'but if you must, do not be quite so obvious in the selection of images. I was not aware that you had met Mrs. Cavalossi.'

'Oh, yes! On Folkestone Leas,' said Arthur Peterson; and he went off into an eager description of the famous interview between the mature beauty and his callow self. 'I imagine,' he added, 'that Mrs. Cavalossi didn't take quite such a fancy to me as you are kind enough to say your wife has done.'

'Ah! well,' Forrest commented, 'if she snubbed you, I've no doubt you deserved it.'

That evening, after dinner, the three sat in the drawing-room, where, by mutual consent, the men were smoking. The apartment was large, but, like the rest of the house, it had a look of neglect and decay. The furniture was mid-Victorian, solid, ugly, but not uncomfortable. On the walls were large mirrors, which

reflected the light of the great central candelabrum.

It was the moment for intimate conversation or for silence. The fire on the great hearth blazed up warm and inviting; Sylviane and Peterson sat in easy chairs on either side of it. Arthur Forrest stood up, a cigarette in one hand, a cup of coffee in the other.

'Piano any good?' he questioned of Peterson.

'Pretty fair, I think; never touch it myself.'

'I'll give you one of the old tunes—you remember, eh?'

'What—"Carmen"?'

With a nod Arthur Forrest, putting down his cup, went over to the piano, which was at the far end of the room, and began to play the Toreador song.

Sylviane leaned suddenly towards Peterson. 'That song seems to have memories for you,' she said; 'tell me about your early friendship with my husband.'

'What shall I tell you?'

'Well, to begin with, how did you first meet?'

'It was like this. We were each of us

driving up in a *fiacre* to the Midi Station in Paris, and his *fiacre* ran into mine, and there was a fearful collision and spilling of luggage, and a tremendous outpouring of French and English oaths; at least, that's my version. It's only fair to tell you that your husband's version of the affair is that my *fiacre* ran into his. However, we met like that. It turned out that we were both in a hurry to catch the Lyons express, and we both missed it. So we agreed to stay in Paris for another day, and to spend the time together. We got on famously. Of course, Forrest was, relatively, much older than me then than he is now; I believe I was only nineteen. It was my first journey on the Continent—one Long Vacation.'

'What a strange coincidence!' Sylviane murmured.

'Where was the coincidence?' asked Peterson.

'That—that you should both be trying to catch the same train.'

'Do you call that strange?' said Peterson; and his eyes said: 'What a delightful, simple little thing you are!'

'And then, I suppose, you began to see a

good deal of each other?' Sylviane continued her catechism.

'Yes,' he said, 'we travelled together a good deal in various parts of Europe afterwards, he seeing old pictures, I seeing old buildings. It was in Cadiz that we had *the* adventure of my career, at the opera there—a wretched enough opera-house it is, too; "Carmen" was the opera—I remember the whole thing perfectly. Afterwards we went together for a stroll on the Alameda. And there something happened—— But Arthur made me swear never to mention it to any one.'

'You may tell me.'

'I think I may. It was only that he saved my life; don't ask me the details. The affair was one common enough in Cadiz.'

'I felt sure that either you or he had saved the other's life. There is something in your attitude towards each other I cannot explain——'

'You are right,' said Peterson, eyeing the woman with adoration.

Arthur Forrest had finished the Toreador song, and begun the dance from the first act.

'Upon my word,' said Peterson, glancing

at his friend, 'he looks as if he had never had a day's illness in his life. Was he very ill?'

Sylviane leaned back in the chair, and covered her face for a moment with one hand.

'I will tell you,' she said—and her voice was charged with feeling—'what I have said neither to him nor to any one else—I never expected him to get better; it was a miracle. You see him now well and strong, and take his recovery for granted. To me it is a miracle—even now I can scarcely believe it—I had absolutely abandoned hope; I was ready to throw myself down and die by his side.'

Peterson felt the tears coming into his eyes, and he coughed.

'I didn't know it was so bad,' he said; 'you must have nursed him superbly; and Arthur says that Dr. Colpus is something rather special.'

The girl shuddered.

'Dr. Colpus,' she murmured; 'Dr. Colpus saved my husband by pure force of will; he scarcely left his bedside for thirty-six hours!'

'I suppose you know that I called at the hotel at Folkestone every day to inquire after Forrest—every day for a fortnight, that is. I

was obliged to clear out of Folkestone at the end of a fortnight, as I had come to the end of my money.'

'Did you, really?' Sylviane replied; 'I had no idea—no one told me.'

'Well, perhaps every one was too busy.'

'I'm glad to think you called like that every day,' she said.

'Are you? How nice of you!'

Both were silent; Peterson averted his face. As for Sylviane, she gave her host a long look, in which were strangely mingled compassion and troubled curiosity. Then Arthur returned from his excursion to the piano.

'My young friend,' said the latter gaily, 'we are quite private. How much are you worth? I should really like to know.'

'Would you?' said Peterson, 'if I tell you, you won't think I'm boasting?'

'I promise.'

'Well, I'm worth a little over three millions.'

Sylviane was looking into the fire, and did not move her head.

'Ah!' said Arthur Forrest, calmly, 'well, I must say that this house doesn't do much credit to a person of your means—shall we

say "ample means"? Excuse my frankness, but you and I were always rude to each other.'

'It doesn't,' Peterson agreed; 'nor do I take the slightest pride in it.'

'But surely it is your old home,' interrupted Sylviane, quickly.

'Yes, in a way it is; but I was always at school or at Oxford, you know. And when at the age of twenty-one, after the 'Varsity, I declined to be a colliery master, and insisted on being an architect, my respected father informed me that I could go; so I went. Radway Grange was no home to me; you see, my mother died when I was quite tiny. To me the place was always ugly and cheerless—my father never attempted to make it otherwise. He and I had quarrelled, and though he allowed me a few hundreds a year, I had no idea whether or not he would leave me the whole or any part of his fortune. I didn't even know he was a millionaire; he was a peculiar man—I speak of him quite without prejudice.'

'Peterson's tone had perceptibly hardened; there was a pause.

'The park is fairly large, isn't it?' said Arthur Forrest at length.

'The park is magnificent,' Peterson agreed enthusiastically, 'and I shall not leave it. To-morrow you must inspect its beauties.'

'Then you will stay here, after all, in this abode so ugly and cheerless,' Arthur smiled.

'By no means; I am building a new house on the hill just behind.'

'What, already? But you have only been here a couple of months!'

'I needn't explain to you, my dear Arthur, said Peterson, 'that architecture is my passion—architecture and horses, that is. Two years ago, when the lawyer read to me my father's will, I instantly determined what I should do. I would not leave Radway; I would not live in this wretched house—I would build a new one in the position which ought to have been originally chosen. I have been at work on the plans ever since. It will be superb; it will be the finest private mansion in Staffordshire, and that is saying a good deal. Immediately I came into possession here I began operations; a hundred men are at work every day. The foundations are laid; in parts the walls are at the first story.'

'You are positively a magician, Mr. Peterson,'

murmured Sylviane, stirred from her usual apathy, while Arthur Forrest whistled a high note of surprise.

'It is the one privilege of a millionaire—to be a magician,' said Peterson.

'We must see this wonderful palace.' Arthur Forrest laughed.

'Rather! I spend whole days there. Immediately after breakfast to-morrow, eh?'

'Agreed.' Forrest walked to the window, and drawing aside the blind looked out. 'What a perfect night! The moon is simply marvellous.'

'Look here,' said Peterson, struck with a sudden idea, 'let's wrap up and go out on to the hill to-night. Would you care, Mrs. Forrest? It isn't far, and the place looks splendid at night—sort of Coliseum touch, you know; and the view of the Five Towns in the distance beats everything. Pardon my enthusiasm, but will you come?'

Forrest looked at his wife, and she smiled a consent.

We will humour you, Peterson,' said Forrest; 'you are a little mad, but we will humour you.'

Arthur Peterson suddenly scowled, and then straightened his features.

'I wish to goodness you wouldn't regard me as a madman, my dear fellow,' he said.

'But you are, you know,' laughed Forrest.

'It will be quite an adventure,' said Sylviane, with eagerness.

Peterson rang the bell twice, and in a moment a servant entered. On beholding Arthur Forrest, the servant bowed respectfully.

'Sims!' said Forrest, astonished and somewhat taken aback.

'Yes, sir,' said the man, discreetly smiling; 'I am glad to see you better, sir.'

At the sound of that quiet and sinister voice, Sylviane looked up quickly; a sharp sigh escaped her, and then, ignoring the servant, she turned her head away and gazed into the fire; her face had paled. Peterson gave some necessary orders about wraps and lanterns, and Sims departed again.

'It appears that you know my new man,' said Peterson; 'I may tell you he is a jewel.'

'He was with my mother-in-law,' Arthur Forrest replied; 'I did not know he had left her.' Sylviane said nothing.

'He came to me with first-rate references,' said Peterson, 'in answer to an advertisement of mine, and I am entirely satisfied with him; in fact, I am enchanted with the fellow.'

Sims presently re-entered the drawing-room with overcoats and wraps.

'By the way, Sims,' said his master, 'have they told you of the accidents this afternoon?'

'Yes, sir; very curious indeed. I happened to be in the stable-yard this morning when they were washing the dog-cart, and it struck me what a well-made cart it was.'

'You didn't happen to examine the wheels?'

'No, sir, I didn't.'

'Are the lanterns ready?'

'They are at the conservatory-door, sir.

'Thanks, that will do.'

CHAPTER XII

MR. SIMS SEES THE DOOR LOCKED

PETERSON and the two Forrests were soon at the summit of the hill which bore the first beginnings of the superb mansion that was to be. Each of the men carried a lantern, but the white illumination of the moon, flooding earth and sky with soft radiance, rendered these unnecessary. As Peterson had predicted, the rising walls of the new house had just the romantic appearance of some immense and age-worn ruin. There was a long irregular line of wall, with gaps for windows and doors, and cross walls here and there breaking away from it at right angles. Huge scaffolding, sharply silhouetted against the sky, lifted a network tracery above everything. In one place, near the centre of the *façade*, the scaffolding rose considerably higher than elsewhere.

As they approached the huge erection all three were impressed by the utter silence, the

spectral and perfect stillness which enveloped the spot.

'It is as if the place had been abandoned,' whispered Sylviane.

'Is there no night watchman?' Arthur Forrest asked.

'No,' answered Peterson; 'why should there be? My own land, which is in a ring fence, extends for half a mile in every direction.'

Involuntarily Sylviane stopped when they were within fifty yards of the building.

'Come along,' said Peterson.

'It is very uncanny,' she said.

'Yes, it is a bit,' he replied, 'especially if you give way to the feeling. But you must come near by, and see the blaze and smoke-trails of the Five Towns' furnaces seven miles off; that is a sight which you will not soon forget.'

They walked close up to the line of the *façade*, and the tremendous scale of the architecture stood for the first time fully revealed.

'Why, Peterson,' exclaimed Arthur Forrest, 'it is simply prodigious!'

'Yes,' the host said with pride, 'I expect it looks pretty big to you. I've got used to it.'

'And you've done this in two months?'

'The workmen have. Of course, it's only just commenced; this is nothing. It will cost two hundred thousand, and another hundred thousand to furnish.'

'Peterson, you are a man of large ideas. I congratulate you.'

'Oh, stuff! You see that scaffolding there, towards the middle—that is the beginning of the great central double tower. If you care we will get up to the top of the scaffolding. It is worth doing; unless we climb that we can't get the view of the Five Towns without going round the end of the building to the back. What do you say, Mrs. Forrest?'

'Is it up ladders?' she inquired, with a woman's timidity.

'Oh, no; the stairways are quite practicable—I had them made so for the sake of the workmen. You see, this is not a contract job.'

'We will go,' said Arthur. 'Excelsior,

Sylviane ; it will do you good!' He was in the brightest spirits.

Under the guidance of Peterson, they found themselves presently involved in a medley of poles and planks, with a steep stairway in front of them. To right and left of them stretched long vistas of bricks, pale in the moonlight.

They climbed and turned corners, and climbed and turned corners; and at length, with quickened breathing, they were on the topmost stage of the scaffolding, forty feet above the ground.

'Look,' said Peterson, stretching forth his hand.

Far away in the distance they could see a rich crimson glare, with a glowing canopy of smoke stretched above it.

'Those are the chief works of the Peterson Collieries and Ironworks Company at Turnhill; they always remind me of a huge cauldron served by Titans. Better than fireworks, isn't it?' he added.

Forrest and his wife gave no answer; they gazed spellbound.

Suddenly Sylviane glanced backwards.

'What was that?' she exclaimed.

'What was what, my dear?'

'I thought I heard some one behind us, Arthur.'

'Don't be nervous, Sylvie; I am afraid the moon and the Peterson furnaces are too much for you.'

For answer she clung to him.

'I saw some one,' she whispered.

'Nonsense!'

'I saw some one, and I heard a footstep.'

'Never mind, Sylvie; let us assume it was a ghost.'

This brief colloquy was spoken too low to be heard by Arthur Peterson. Forrest tried to reassure his wife. Then he said to himself that she must be over-fatigued with the journey. But despite his efforts to laugh away her alarms, the fear in Sylvie's eyes had communicated itself to his own heart.

'Come over here now, to the other side,' said Peterson, 'and you will see the lights of Crewe shunting yard. Don't be afraid; there are four planks together, wide enough for an army, but unfortunately there is no handrail. Follow me; it is absolutely safe.'

He pointed to a sort of bridge, perfectly

plain in the moonlight, which led from the staging upon which they stood to a similar staging on the other side.

'Come along,' he repeated, and stepped forward on to the bridge. One of the planks yielded, and in an instant, as if by magic, Peterson had disappeared. There was no cry, no sound—except Sylviane's short, suppressed shriek. Husband and wife listened in vain for the least sign of life.

He was gone, extinguished. One moment he stood before them, plain and tangible in the moonlight; the next he had become invisible, inaudible; it was as though some sinister and mysterious hand had risen out of the void and plucked him down.

'The plank must have slipped off the cross-beam,' said Forrest.

Why is it that in the presence of sudden disaster the human mind invariably takes refuge in the banal, the obvious? Here was an immortal soul snatched strangely away, and Arthur Forrest must needs remark that the plank had slipped off the cross-beam!

'There was no sound of a fall,' he con-

tinued, trying to assume a natural inflection of voice. 'Did you hear anything, Sylvie?'

Sylviane shook her head slowly.

'He is killed!' she cried.

Arthur got on his knees and peered down into the gulf, but all was blackness there; he could see nothing. The lanterns had been left below.

'Peterson!' he called; the cry echoed weirdly—no answer.

'I tell you he is killed.'

'Let us go down,' said Arthur; 'take my hand.'

He could not even try to reassure her, now. He called himself fatuous for having tried to reassure her before. Are not the divinations, the presciences, of women, subtler and surer than those of men? Has it not always been so, and will it not always be so? Yet men persist in the pretence that women are creatures of causeless alarms and absurd trepidations.

He sought to guess what it was, or who it was, that Sylviane had seen and heard; but he could find no answer to that riddle. His wife hesitated to move—if one plank yielded, why should not another yield?

'Come along,' he said imperiously, almost brutally.

'Is it safe?' she tremblingly murmured.

'Have no fear,' he said, with masculine certainty.

And they crept down the rough stairways, slowly, cautiously, alternating between spaces of bright moonlight and spaces of deep blackness. As they reached the lower stage of the scaffolding a half-smothered voice shouted: 'All right—it's all right;' and a figure approached them. It was Peterson himself.

'It's all right,' he said, talking loudly from excitement; 'I hope you weren't alarmed. I fell into a heap of sand which had been dumped down only this afternoon for the mortar mill. I was a bit choked and stunned at first, but I'm quite unhurt. It was a longish drop, though, forty feet! Great Scott! If that sand hadn't been there, every bone in my body would have been broken. Look here, if you don't mind, we'll go back to the house and have a brandy and soda apiece.'

As Peterson emerged from the shadow it could be seen that he had lost his hat; his hair was tousled, and the disarray of his

clothes was plainly apparent even in the moonlight.

Forrest felt the weight of Sylviane's body against his side. She was on the point of swooning.

'Steady, dear girl,' he encouraged her, and with an obedient effort she recovered herself.

'Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Forrest,' said Peterson, coming still nearer. 'I'm as right as a trivet, though I dare say I shall be a bit stiff to-morrow.'

'I'm awfully glad you aren't hurt,' said Arthur Forrest. 'But you must certainly set this down as a day of miracles, Peterson.'

'Yes, indeed,' said Peterson; and, picking up their lanterns, they walked to the house with scarcely another word; none could find anything to say.

Then a loud sigh, like the sighing of a leviathan—regular, stertorous, and horrid—was borne to them on the still night air. Sylviane's arm fluttered in Forrest's, and he clutched it tighter.

'What is that infernal noise?' he asked Peterson.

'That—oh! it's only one of my blast-

furnaces, one of the Peterson Company's blast-furnaces, that is to say, between here and Turnhill; it's four or five miles off. If you heard it close to, you would think it was something to take notice of.' The youth laughed loudly again, for he was still under the influence of strong excitement. Now a blast-furnace is the most ordinary affair in the world—in the Midlands. Yet, to Arthur Forrest, who was no feeble victim of imaginative terrors, that blast-furnace seemed to be transmitting the dark messages of fate; it seemed as if it were a chorus to the accidents of the day.

As they passed through the conservatory the master of the house shouted out: 'Sims, where is Sims? I want my clothes brushed; and tell some one to bring brandy and soda into the drawing-room at once.'

'I am here, sir,' answered Sims, entering the conservatory behind them from the garden. Arthur Forrest flashed his lantern upon the man's face. It wore an impassive, respectful smile—a guileless smile—the smile of a man who, knowing his own worth and recognising the worth of others, is at peace with the world.

That night Forrest, having stayed up rather late talking with Peterson, sat finishing a cigarette in the dressing-room which adjoined the Forrests' bedroom. The whole house was silent, except for those vague, inexplicable sounds which only make themselves heard in the darkness. He put the end of the cigarette into an ash-tray, and, going towards the window, looked out. The moon was sinking over the hill, and her light shone through the scaffolding of the new mansion, which stood quaint and bare, like a black skeleton in that luminous flood.

Suddenly he heard a noise within the room.

'Arthur!'

A pale figure crouched at his feet; it was Sylviane in her night-dress. Trembling and shaken with sobs, her hair loose, her eyes misty with tears, she bent before him, the image of despair and tribulation.

'My dear Sylvie, are you ill?' He picked her up and put her on a chair. 'What is it—a bad dream?'

'Would to God it were!' she answered, clutching his hand and then dropping it as

though it burnt her. 'Arthur, they are trying to kill him!'

'Who is trying to kill—kill whom?'

'Mr. Peterson. I know it.'

'My dear Sylvie, what are you talking about?'

He said to himself that his wife's manner had been strange and curious since they went into the drawing-room after dinner.

'*Sims is here*,' she insisted with a terrible emphasis. 'Immediately I saw Sims in the drawing-room I knew that something was afoot.' She ceased sobbing, and murmured inarticulately.

'Come,' he said, soothing her; if you cry, I can't tell a word you say. What is all this about Sims?'

'It is a plot,' she said. 'Can't you see? The breaking of the trace, the wheel coming off, and then that loose plank to-night; it is a miracle Mr. Peterson isn't dead. But they will do it yet; nothing will stop them. You don't know them, Arthur'

'Who are they?'

'Dr. Colpus—and——'

'Dr. Colpus?'

'Yes, and—O Arthur—my mother!'

'Sylviane!'

'Yes, my mother. They have sent Sims down here—he is working for them; I am convinced of it. When we were on the top of the scaffolding I saw some one—it must have been Sims.'

'But, Sylvie, why should Dr. Colpus and your mother wish to kill Peterson?' His intention was to humour her. He thought her mind was wandering, that Peterson's narrow escape had affected her brain.

She paused a moment, and seemed to be gathering herself together for a great effort.

'Listen, Arthur,' she said, 'I must tell you everything—I should have told you long ago, but I daren't; I was so afraid of mamma. It was all a plot from the beginning. Before we met you, mamma and Dr. Colpus knew that you were entitled to the Peterson fortune; that was *why* we met you. I had orders to marry you. You can guess the rest of the plot; you know it, in fact. The marriage being accomplished, Dr. Colpus was to pretend that he had only just found out your connection with the Petersons.'

The idea that his wife's mind was wander-

ing vanished in a moment; he knew somehow that she was speaking the cold and bitter truth. A thousand trifles came back to him out of the past—trifles hitherto ignored or disdained; and these trifles confirmed the tremendous indictment against her mother and Dr. Colpus which Sylvie had outlined in those few pregnant and breathless sentences.

His brain reeled under the intoxication of dreadful thoughts.

'Sylvie!' he cried, standing up, 'did you marry me because you thought I was going to be a millionaire?'

She hid her beautiful face in her hands. 'No, before God I didn't!' she answered in a whisper; 'I loved you—I do love you, Arthur! Don't you believe me?'

'I believe you,' he said, without moving; 'go on, Sylviane.'

'What put them out was your refusal of the fortune, and the fact that you knew all about it before. They hadn't calculated on that; they had to begin again. O Arthur, I overheard them talking that night you were so very ill; I had the most frightful suspicion, and so I crept to the door of the drawing-room that

night when your influenza took a turn for the worse, and I heard what Dr. Colpus and mamma said to each other. Mamma—mamma —— I can't tell you.'

'You must tell me, Sylviane.'

'She—she wanted you to die, Arthur! She opened the bedroom window so that you might—so that you wouldn't get better, Arthur. I found it just a little open after she had left the room; she had not closed it properly. I would have given worlds to accuse her, but I daren't—I daren't. I was always afraid of her.'

'Why did your mother wish me to die?' he asked, coldly.

'She thought when you were dead the fortune could be claimed on my behalf—that was what I overheard; but Dr. Colpus said it would be difficult, and that you must be saved at all costs. Then I heard him say to her that the *other Arthur was more in the way.* They think that if Mr. Peterson was dead you would be sure to accept the fortune.'

'It can't be true!' Forrest exclaimed; 'it is incredible.' A thrill of amazement and unspeakable wrath shook him from head to foot.

'It is true,' she said; 'and that is why

Sims is here now. Sims is invaluable. Sims may be relied on to do what he is told.'

Forrest walked to and fro in the room.

'Yes,' he said, stopping at length before his wife, 'it is true; in my heart of hearts I have always known that your mother was an adventuress. But I thought only of you.'

'Arthur, I will leave you to-morrow; it is the least I can do. Let us say good-bye now!'

She, too, stood up, and for a moment fronted him. Her marvellous face, surrounded by the loose coils of her hair, was a sublime appeal to his mercy. The pathos of her position brought the tears to his eyes, and made him forget the perils through which he himself had passed, and those by which Arthur Peterson was still surrounded.

'I will leave you to-morrow!' she repeated more firmly. Her eyes wavered as they met his.

'Leave me?' he cried.

'Yes; I must. I tell you it is the least I can do—my mother's blood runs in my veins. Did I not at the beginning consent to the plot? Oh, yes, yes! I am only fit for hell! I am unworthy that you should ever look at me

again. But let me swear to you first, Arthur, that I did not know they meant murder—I only knew you were going to be rich, very rich. If I had not happened to fall in love with you, my husband, I should have married you without a scruple. And when I found that I loved you, I said to myself that I must not marry you, that it would not be fair to you. But my love for you tempted me, and the temptation was too strong for poor little me —and mamma was so awful. And I did so want to be your wife, Arthur. I promised myself that after we were married I would tell you ; but even then I dared not—I was afraid lest you would despise me and send me back to mamma. And now, now that I have seen you nearly murdered, and Mr. Peterson nearly murdered, I cannot keep silence any longer. Arthur, you must try to forgive me ; and if you can't forgive, forget. I shall go away, far from you, and far, far from my mother —— No ! I will not ask you for a kiss before I leave you.'

'Leave me?' he repeated ; 'you say you have seen me nearly murdered, do you wish to murder me yourself?'

'Arthur!' she cried.

'Then don't say another syllable about leaving me!'

She sank at his feet.

'Poor victim!' he involuntarily exclaimed. Without another word he lifted her in his arms, and carried her to the bedroom; she closed her eyes as if in exhaustion, he waited by the bedside till she should open them.

'Sylvie,' he breathed softly, 'I trust you as I trust myself; you will never leave me!'

She smiled with a relief exquisitely sad. 'In all my idle life,' she murmured, 'I have done nothing to deserve your love and your goodness.'

'Angel!' he replied, 'it is sufficient that you exist. The lilies toil not, neither do they spin. And now you must sleep; you aren't afraid, are you?'

'Not now,' she sighed.

He turned away, profoundly moved.

'Arthur,' she whispered.

'Dearest, what is it?' he gazed at her again.

'Mr. Peterson,' she murmured, 'you will save him?'

'Rest in peace, my love,' he said; and she thanked him for the reassurance with a look.

At that moment there was a discreet knock at the dressing-room door; they both started.

'Who is there?' said Forrest, loudly.

'I, sir.'

'Wait a moment, then.'

Forrest passed a hand gently over his wife's forehead. Then going into the dressing-room, he locked the door between the bedroom and the dressing-room, and opened the outer door.

'Come in,' he said, and a man entered.

'Oh, Sims,' said Forrest, 'is that you? Up late, aren't you?' With a quick motion he locked the outer door also.

CHAPTER XIII

MR. SIMS MEETS WITH A REVOLVER

It was not without a little sign of astonishment that the imperturbable Sims saw Arthur Forrest lock the door of the dressing-room.

'Mr. Peterson's compliments, sir,' he said quietly, 'and he forgot to tell you that he was going out early to-morrow morning, and hopes you won't wait breakfast for him if he should happen to be late.'

'Oh!' said Arthur Forrest, as he put his right hand into a brown bag which lay open on a table; 'so your master is starting out early to-morrow. He said nothing to me, and I only left him a quarter of an hour ago.'

'No, sir; he forgot.'

'He is in bed now?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Is he shooting to-morrow morning?'

'No, sir; I—I think it's on some business

connected with the new house that he's going out.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Forrest, with as much of the magisterial manner as he could command, but without looking at Sims. 'By the way, Sims, Mr. Peterson seemed surprised when I happened to remark this evening that you had previously been in the employ of Mrs. Cavalossi.'

'Did he, sir?'

'He did. Does not that strike you as curious?'

'I'm afraid I don't catch your drift, sir.'

'My drift should be fairly plain to a person of your acute intelligence, Sims. If your excellent references, of which Mr. Peterson made special mention in our conversation, were not forged, surely they should have borne the name of your previous employer?'

'The inference does not follow, sir. My reference bore the name of my last employer but one.'

'How was that?'

'Well, sir, to tell you the truth, I had the misfortune to differ from Mrs. Cavalossi—Mrs Colpus as she now is—on an important point.

Not to mince matters, sir, we quarrelled. The influence of Dr. Colpus, sir, I'm afraid; and Mrs. Colpus declined to give me a character of any sort. She's a rather fearsome lady, sir, when she's roused.' The gentle forgiveness in Sims's tone was wholly delightful.

'Very ingenious, Sims!' said Forrest, who was by no means prepared to swallow this specious explanation. It did not require much shrewdness to guess that if the Colpuses and Sims had quarrelled they had carefully rehearsed the quarrel beforehand.

'In these days, sir,' Sims pursued, 'it's difficult to get a good place, and so you see I was obliged to draw a veil over my four years' service under Mrs. Colpus. One must live, sir; and there was no harm done by a little innocent deception. I am glad to think that Mr. Peterson is well satisfied with my efforts to suit him.'

'You think he is satisfied?'

'He has been good enough to tell me as much, sir.'

'And I understand that his message is that he is going out early to-morrow morning, and we are not to wait breakfast for him?'

'Those were his words, sir.'

'Indeed!' Forrest looked up at Mr. Sims for the first time. 'I suppose, Sims,' he said slowly, 'that this message doesn't happen to be an invention of yours?'

'I fail to grasp your meaning, sir.'

'Well, suppose, for instance, that you intended to get rid of your master during the night, and wanted to arrange that the discovery of his disappearance should occur as late as possible to-morrow.'

'Sir!'

'You heard what I said, my friend.'

'Get rid of my master?'

'Yes; or, if you prefer the phrase, murder him, annihilate him—of course by accident, pure accident.'

'Really, Mr. Forrest, I must protest—— I —I trust it isn't the brandy——'

'Sims, it's all up. I know the whole scheme hatched between you and the Colpuses; and so you may as well accept your defeat quietly.'

For once in his life, Sims was astounded out of his presence of mind, and he made a false move—he rushed for the door.

'Stop!' cried Forrest, and with the word he took out of the bag a loaded revolver. 'It is a habit of mine always to carry this,' he said.

Sims stopped.

'Sit down, Sims; I want to have a chat.'

Instead of sitting down, Sims edged towards the door.

'Sit down, Sims,' Forrest repeated softly. 'As for the door, it's locked.' He lifted the revolver in the direction of Sim's forehead.

'You'll never dare to use it,' said Sims, who was now himself again.

'Won't I!' Forrest replied; 'I should advise you not to trespass too far on my good nature. For the third time I request you to sit down—take that chair over there.'

Sims obeyed.

'Now we can proceed,' said Arthur Forrest; and he too sat down, with the revolver on his knees. 'We won't talk loud, because my wife is trying to go to sleep in the next room.'

'I may as well tell you, sir,' Sims put in, 'that I haven't the least idea what all this extraordinary fuss is about. I merely came here with a message from my master——'

'Listen to me, Sims, and listen carefully. I haven't the slightest doubt that you are an unrelieved scoundrel; but sometimes it is necessary for honest men to make use of scoundrels, and with your permission I propose to make use of you. I know, beyond any sort of doubt, that there is a plot against the life of Mr. Peterson, and that you are the most active agent in that plot. I can prove what I say, and a great deal more. Now, I will make you an offer. If you will tell me all that you know—*all*, mind you—and undertake to leave the country instantly—I will let you go. On the other hand, if you are obstinate, I shall merely keep you here and send for the police.'

'You had better send for them, then,' said Sims, with the air of a martyr, 'for I can't possibly tell you the details of a plot of which I know nothing.'

'Don't be a fool, Sims.' Forrest had made at least one bold invention in his last speech, and he cast about now for another one of even greater force. He regretted at that moment that he had not had more practice in skilful lying. 'I saw you on the scaffolding to-night, Sims, and my wife saw you too. To-

morrow Mr. Peterson will be told everything. Further,' he went on, 'I know that you had been meddling with the wheel of the dogcart. The breaking of the trace may or may not have been an accident.'

Sims's eyebrows made the least movement in the world, and then there was a pause.

'How do I know, if I tell you anything, that you'll let me go?' asked Sims sullenly.

'You don't know, Sims; you'll just have to trust me. I might break my word; you can't be sure.'

Sims looked longingly at the window.

'Come,' said Forrest, 'will you be free or will you go to prison?'

'What do you wish me to tell you?'

Arthur Forrest gave an involuntary sigh of relief. He knew now that Sylviane's suspicions were well founded.

'I will ask you a few questions; they will be blunt and to the point, and I want plain answers. No protestations, no shilly-shallying, no nonsense. First question: how much were you to receive from the Colpuses when Mr. Peterson was dead?'

'Sir, I really——'

'How much?'

'Ten thousand down——'

'Yes, ten thousand down, and——?'

'And twenty thousand afterwards.'

'Good. Second question: Do the Colpuses know that your attempts to-day have failed?'

'No.'

'When will they know?'

'About 8.30 to-morrow morning, as near as I can tell.'

'Supposing that Mr. Peterson shouldn't - er—die suddenly during the next few days; supposing, in fact, that you found yourself unable to do what you came here to do—what would be the next move? You can assume that I know the objects of this conspiracy.'

'Mrs. Colpus would tell Mr. Peterson that his fortune was really yours.'

'They think he would at once relinquish it in my favour?'

'Yes; if the facts were proved to him—as they would be.'

'Why haven't they tried this move first?'

'Because it isn't certain; he *might* refuse to give it up, and——'

'And if he gave it up I might refuse

to take it even then. That's the argument, is it? And so you all thought it simpler to get Mr. Peterson comfortably out of the way! Now for the third question: Did you precious plotters assume that if Mr. Peterson was dead, my objections to accepting the fortune would be removed?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I see; thanks. Fourth question: How long have you known Dr. Colpus and Mrs. Cavalossi—I mean Mrs. Colpus?'

'Nearly twenty years.'

'Been Mrs. Cavalossi's servant all that time?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Then why did you tell me, a few minutes ago, that you had only been in her employ during the last four years?'

'A slip of the tongue, sir.'

'Nevertheless, you referred to people who had employed you before Mrs. Colpus. Who were they?'

'Oh, dear! Mr. Forrest!' exclaimed Sims, 'you are worse than a cross-examining counsel at the Old Bailey.' He beamed with vague politeness. 'I may as well be frank with you,

sir. I have never had any other employer than Mrs. Colpus.'

'Your previous statement was a lie?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Then you are acquainted with Mrs. Colpus's affairs pretty intimately?'

'Yes, sir.'

The man smiled for a fraction of a second.

'Let me see,' continued Arthur. 'Is there anything else? Yes, there is. Fifth question: Supposing that I did accept the fortune, how is that to benefit you and the Colpuses? Mrs. Colpus is my mother-in-law, and she would doubtless like to have me a millionaire; but still, she would be entirely dependent on my good nature as regards a share in the Peterson millions. Was it your intention, as soon as I had accepted the fortune, to send me after Mr. Peterson?'

'Do you really expect me to answer that, sir?'

'I do; and by God you shall! Say it, man.'

The reply came quietly enough.

'Yes, that was the intention, sir. You know you have made a will in favour of your wife.'

'Ah, my wife!' Arthur murmured; 'Mrs. Colpus doesn't seem to have much regard for her daughter's feelings,' he said bitterly.

'Her daughter,' said Sims, 'ought to be getting used to being made a widow.'

Stung with a sudden thought, Arthur sprang up. 'What does that mean?'

Sims's smile was hideous. 'While I am on the subject I may as well tell you,' he said. 'Perhaps you forgot that Mr. Drew died the day after his marriage. He was worth a matter of thirty thousand, I believe, and that proved very useful to Mrs. Cavalossi.'

For a moment Arthur could not speak. 'And was Drew——?' He stopped; he could not frame the suggestion.

Sims nodded impassively.

'Who did it?'

'Colpus.'

'But my wife had no suspicion? No; she couldn't have had.'

'She had no suspicion.'

Arthur sat down again. He was conscious of growing pale. The idea of Sylviane being thus made an innocent lure, by means of her

beauty, for bringing men of wealth into the clutches of this vile trio, completely staggered him; it was too horrible. The infamy of it surpassed anything in his experience; it stunned his senses.

'Sims,' he said at length, recovering himself, 'you and your accomplices or employers are the most damnable villains that I have ever heard of. I said I would let you go, and I will. Go instantly; I will see you off the premises. You shall have twelve hours' start.' He rose, the revolver still in his hand.

'Thank you, sir,' said Sims.

CHAPTER XIV

CONNUBIAL

MEANWHILE scenes not without interest were passing in London. On the same night that Arthur Peterson fell forty feet into a hillock of sand, Dr. Colpus and the desire of his eyes sat together in one of the drawing-rooms of the Hotel Cecil. They sat together in a corner, as far as possible from the lordly portal of the apartment; it was as though they wished to extinguish themselves amid the rich hangings and furniture of that gold-and-green chamber. The night was advanced into morning—precisely, it was a quarter to two A.M. An attendant entered the drawing-room and looked round with an air of profound injury; for, although in large hotels it is a rule that guests are never absolutely sent off to bed, being in theory at liberty to remain up from the dewy eve of the Thames Embankment to the radiant morn of the Strand, there is nevertheless a

sort of tacit understanding that the public rooms are to be abandoned about the hour of two o'clock at latest. Every other woman in the hotel had retired long ago, save only a French actress, who had a private sitting-room and a team of mules wherewith to advertise herself in the courtyard of the Cecil—hence the lackey's air of injury.

'Beg pardon,' he said, 'I came to turn lights out. I thought——'

Dr. Colpus dismissed him with an abrupt gesture. The lackey's words had been decently civil, but his manner had been unmistakably insolent. No human being is more perfectly human than a footman in a large hotel devoted to the service of wealth. This footman had observed the financial declension of the Doctor and his wife—a few months ago the Doctor and his wife had occupied the very sitting-room now used by the French actress who drove mules. Force of circumstances had compelled them to relinquish that sitting-room, for it is a fact that you cannot lounge in a private sitting-room at the Cecil on sixpence three-farthings a day. Dr. and Mrs. Colpus had somewhat more than sixpence three-farthings a day; but

their daily income was steadily diminishing to that figure; therefore the lackey, beholding their gradual fall, had put a gradually increasing insolence day by day into his demeanour towards them, thus demonstrating his humanness.

'Confounded cheek!' exclaimed the Doctor, when the footman had departed.

'We will go over to the Savoy,' said Mrs. Colpus pettishly.

'Certainly,' agreed the Doctor; 'after we have paid our bill here!' He smiled.

'You need not be witty at my expense, Frank,' said the wife, with the gesture of a martyr.

He took her gallantly in his arms and kissed thrice that marvellous and ageless face. Without doubt the Doctor could perform to perfection the *rôle* of elderly and accomplished beau.

'Forgive me!' he entreated; 'and on your birthday, too!'

Mrs. Colpus winced and closed her eyes for an instant.

'Let us retire,' she said.

It was her thirty-fifth birthday, always a *dies iræ* in the life of a beautiful woman. Mrs.

Colpus had a passable amount of philosophy in her composition, but one is obliged to admit that she had not got through that day without captiousness, without the expression of a perhaps pardonable annoyance at her inability to emulate Joshua's feat of arresting the sun. Thirty-five years! In five more she would be forty! In a woman whose chief capital is her beauty, to be forty is a crime against society. And Mrs. Colpus felt that on that day five years hence she should in all probability commit a dramatic and picturesque suicide which would look well in the papers.

So they went to bed, glum, morose, moody, and preoccupied. But on the way thither Dr. Colpus made a *détour* to the bureau and peered at the telegram pigeon-holes. There was, however, no orange envelope which bore his honoured name.

'Anything come?' inquired his wife as he rejoined her in the sleeping chamber.

'Nothing,' he replied simply, and passed without another word into his dressing-room. He remained there a considerable time buried in contemplation of things past, things present, and things to come. It was nearly three

o'clock when he stretched himself on one of the pair of gilded couches which were the *pièces de résistance* of the bedroom. The woman who had achieved thirty-five years appeared to be asleep. Stretching out his hand to the switch, he turned off the light at the bed-head and slept also.

But at five o'clock he was awakened by a light in the room. His beautiful wife, clad in a ravishing dressing-gown, was seated at the dressing-table in front of the window. As her back was towards him he could not see what she was doing; but he could hear the rustle of bank-notes and the usually agreeable chinking of golden coins. Now, however, the chinking of golden coins was disagreeable, for it sounded to Dr. Colpus like a melancholy swan-song of wealth.

'Aren't you cold, my dear?' he inquired calmly.

She made no answer. The rustle and chinking proceeded for a space.

Then Mrs. Colpus murmured, as if to the surrounding air: 'Fifty-four pounds ten.'

'And our bill this week will be at least sixty,' the Doctor answered evenly.

'How horrid you are!' said the woman. 'I was so anxious, that I could not sleep, and so I got up to think, and to see exactly what our resources were, and—and then you are horrid!'

'This is unworthy of you, my Marie; in your heart you know that I am not horrid; you know that my conduct as a husband has been above reproach. But the fates have been unpropitious towards us, and since you have too much sense to be angry with the fates, you vent your anger on me. Have I not begged you almost on my knees for months past to relinquish this hotel life and all its luxuries, and go and live quietly in that boarding-house I told you of in Bloomsbury Square?'

'Boarding-house in Bloomsbury Square!' exclaimed Mrs. Colpus, turning round in her chair; 'if you mention that again I shall go mad. I should die in Bloomsbury Square.'

'Not you!' said the Doctor; 'a far severer climate than that of Bloomsbury Square will be needed to kill you, my love.'

'I never thought that we should be all these months without doing anything really effectual. I had more belief in your powers, Frank.'

'Well, my pet,' said the Doctor, 'I have done all I can—I am doing all I can; Sims is doing all he can; and you must remember that I warned you in the summer that thirty weeks would not be too much. As a matter of fact, the thirty weeks have not yet expired; but we have been so extravagant that——'

'It isn't extravagance,' she protested; 'it's only what I've always been used to, and what I must have. I can't understand how it is we haven't heard from Sims.'

'Doubtless we shall hear this morning,' said the Doctor, 'and if it will be of the slightest relief to you, my treasure, I will tell you, as a great secret, that I have a hundred-pound note in my pocket-book, so that we are not yet at starvation point, and we can pay our bill at the week-end in triumph.'

'You are mistaken,' she said; 'you left your pocket-book lying about the evening before yesterday; I saw that note, and I appropriated it.'

'Marie!' he gasped.

'Yes; and I sent it to my dressmaker; she was becoming formidable.'

There was a pause.

To-morrow,' said the Doctor solemnly, 'I take fifty pounds out of that fifty-four pounds ten and I start for Monte Carlo. You shall pray for my success.'

He then—and his composure was a complete demonstration of a great mind—turned on his side and sank into slumber. His wife sighed, replaced the notes and the bullion in their receptacle, abandoned her dressing-gown, and crept almost furtively into bed. It was a pathetic scene, and one that poignantly illustrated the truth of sundry axioms in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and Isaiah; these axioms need not be quoted, everybody is aware of their import; everybody professes to believe in them, though comparatively few persons act as though they believed in them.

At eight-fifteen, when the light of a London winter's dawn was struggling through the embroidered blind of the window, there was a tap at the door, and Adela entered with tea and toast for two; it was dry toast. Adela also bore five missives—four of these were accounts rendered; the fifth was a sealed letter and bore the Crewe postmark. Having delivered these and drawn up the blinds, Adela departed.

The Doctor read the letter imperturbably. 'No luck!' he commented, and passed it to his wife.

'Sims is getting old,' said that lady; 'surely he ought to have had the sense to——'

'My dear,' the Doctor interrupted her, 'you are ill.' He suddenly smiled.

'I am not ill,' she contradicted.

'Yes, you are,' he insisted; 'you are ill, because I wish you to be. I have thought of a plan, my love, a plan.'

'What is it?' Her face showed hope.

He spoke low in her ear, and she seemed to approve.

A quarter of an hour later Adela was informed that her mistress was seriously indisposed. The Doctor rose and ate a hearty breakfast; his lunch, however, was less hearty. In the meantime he had received a telegraphic communication from Sims which forced him to change his scheme in more than one particular.

CHAPTER XV

THE RAIN OF SOVEREIGNS

To return to the precincts of Radway Grange, and the previous night.

Arthur Forrest accompanied Mr. Sims as far as the lodge. It was the dead of night, and Sims would have nowhere to go ; nevertheless, Forrest felt that he would have not even a comparative peace of mind till the man had removed his sinister presence from the house. His strong instinct was to get Sims away instantly, and he obeyed that instinct. The scoundrelism, the impassive coldness, and, above all, the absolute shamelessness of the fellow, amazed Forrest, unnerved him, weakened his resolves. Such a character as that of Sims was incredible to such a character as that of Arthur Forrest. The latter was afraid, not of the actual personal danger to himself—he scarcely gave that a thought—but of the moral turpitude which was capable of the villainy

which Sims had calmly confessed. When he reflected upon that trio—the beautiful Mrs. Cavalossi, Colpus, the sagacious Colpus, and the unspeakable servant—silently, implacably, leisurely at work upon a plot so base and so inhuman, he shuddered. The horror of it seized him, and in its clutches he shook convulsively.

As he returned to the house, and re-entered it with furtive steps by the conservatory door, the thought uppermost in his mind was : what is the next move to be? Certainly he had, metaphorically speaking, taken Sims by the throat and drawn his fangs. Beyond doubt, Sims was frightened; Sims was impressed; and Forrest felt convinced that from this particular scoundrel nothing more was to be feared. Sims would decamp, and probably renew his activities in another clime. On the whole, Forrest was glad that he had let him depart; there was solid information gained, and there was also an incubus lifted from his nerves. But what should he do next? The Colpuses remained—clever, inscrutable, determined. How was he to deal with them? He had, he was obliged to admit, no shadow of proof against them. To go to them with a

definite accusation would be absurd; they would laugh at him; they would pretend to be insulted; they would ask him to produce Sims, who had made these startling assertions. Should he go to the police? Probably the police also would offer him only an incredulous smile; in any case, they would ask to be informed why he had permitted Sims to escape. No, he could not at the present stage of affairs go to the police. The only alternative which he could devise was to consult a firm of private detectives, and by their aid make a thorough investigation of the career of Dr. Colpus and Mrs. Cavalossi. But here a sinister doubt—a doubt for which he loathed himself—entered his mind; any such investigation would comprise Sylviane within its scope. Could he bring himself to lift the veil of the past?

Upon one point he did come to a definite and unalterable conclusion. Arthur Peterson should hear nothing of the affair; he knew Peterson, and he knew that, if the slightest breath of the truth reached him, not only would the young man insist upon abandoning his father's fortune, but his whole life would be embittered, and even ruined. It was a possi-

bility which Arthur Forrest refused to contemplate. Peterson believed himself to be an eldest son ; he believed himself to be legitimate ; he believed himself to be the rightful owner of a vast estate. As a matter of fact, he was none of these things ; but Arthur Forrest swore privately, not without bitterness, that his half-brother should never know the truth if he could help it.

He reached the dressing-room again, and quietly opened the door of the bedroom and looked in. Sylviane, wearied by too much emotion, was sleeping. He gazed at her, then closed the door and sat down. Suddenly a notion came to him that he would wake up Arthur Peterson on some excuse, and have a chat with him. He felt that he must talk to some one, and perhaps an opportunity might occur to pave the way for a plausible explanation of Sims's absence on the morrow. He fought against the impulse for a few moments —it seemed rather *bizarre* to wake up one's host in the middle of the night—but in the end he yielded to it, and stepped out into the corridor. Peterson's room, he knew, was at the other side of the house—at the end of the

long corridor which cut through the heart of the mansion like a tunnel.

He stopped outside the door of his own room to listen. Not a sound; nothing but the pale radiance of the westering moon. Before, when he had descended to escort Sims, he had experienced no alarm—none of those strange sensations of the night which attack the nocturnal wanderer in a slumbering house—yet now his flesh crept; a faint, inexplicable fear fell upon him like a clinging mist. He would have gone back and double-locked his door against this unnamed fear; but he was either too proud or too obstinate, and so he went forward to Peterson's room. The floor of the corridor creaked and complained under the tread of his slippered feet; the air was peopled with slight noises, which arose and subsided in the causeless manner of a dream. At length he stood before Peterson's door. The staircase leading to the second story was nearly opposite to it, and to the right was a lofty window. His heart was beating, and he smiled as if in scorn of himself.

He tapped discreetly at the door. 'Peterson, old man!'

There was no answer.

'Peterson! wake up, old chap; I want to come in!'

There was no answer, but his voice sounded with amazing strangeness in the corridor, and it seemed to him to go singing up the stairs towards the roof of the house. Evidently Peterson slept soundly, as a young man should, even though he be a millionaire. Arthur tried the knob; it turned, and he said to himself: 'I'll go in, I've got to talk to some one;' and thereupon he went in. It was a large bedroom. At the end opposite to the door, in front of the window, stood a dressing-table, and on this was a night-light, which cast a flickering yellow gloom across the chamber. The great bed, an old-fashioned erection with four immense posts, stood behind the door. Forrest approached the bed; he could see that it was empty, and that it had not been slept in.

He struck a match, lighted a candle, and examined the room. The wardrobe contained clothes in orderly array. On the table was a dirty collar and a necktie; on a chair in stretchers lay a pair of trousers, and over the back of the chair a white shirt. A waistcoat

lay folded on another chair close by, and on the floor by the bed was a pair of clocked socks. Peterson had evidently prepared for bed, and then——

Forrest raised the candle on high and glanced round the room bewildered. What had happened? A faint sound stole out from a corner. At first it frightened him, with its quick regular impact on his ear; and then he grasped the obvious fact that it was a watch ticking. That watch seemed to be charged with some sinister message for him. Was it possible that Sims, in the short interval at his disposal before he came to Forrest's dressing-room, had——? He felt something warm on his hand, and looked at the hand apprehensively; it was nothing but grease from the candle, which he had been holding crooked—yet the touch of that fallen wax thrilled through him like the touch of blood. He heard a noise in the corridor, and hurriedly went out of the room. A woman's figure, dressed in a loose dark robe, was descending the stairs awkwardly a step at a time. On seeing him with the candle in the doorway the figure started back and threw up its arms.

'Who is there?' he whispered. His heart beat heavily, but he could not help that.

'It's me, sir,' answered a venerable voice, 'Mrs. Hewitt, the housekeeper. I thought I heard some one about, and so I came down to see. Anything the matter, Mr. Forrest? Is Mrs. Forrest ill?'

'Mrs. Hewitt,' he said, 'where is your master?'

'My master, sir?' she stammered, 'isn't he in his room?'

'No,' said Forrest.

She hesitated a moment.

'Then *you* have found it out too?' she whispered.

'I have found out that he is not in his room,' answered Forrest, 'and I want to know where he is; I am not going to bed till I have seen him.'

The old woman leaned down towards Forrest, and, dropping her voice till he could scarcely hear it, said, with beckoning finger: 'Come upstairs.'

Silently he followed her to the second story; she guided him to a bedroom, which he took to be her own.

'Excuse me, sir,' she said, 'I was obliged to bring you here. I want you to look out of the window, sir. Look along to the left, sir, at the third window from this one.'

The window was open, and Forrest obeyed. He saw in the moonlight, projecting from the window which Mrs. Hewitt had indicated, what seemed to be a piece of spouting or gutter-pipe, about six feet in length. This spouting moved slightly, as though some one within the room held it in his hands.

'Come back,' said the warning voice of Mrs. Hewitt, 'don't let him see you'; and Arthur withdrew his head.

'What is it?' he said.

'Listen,' she answered.

With suspended breath he strained his ear for a sound.

'I hear nothing,' he murmured.

'Wait.'

Far below there was the faint noise of a splash.

'Something fell,' he said.

'Listen again.'

And after another interval the noise of the splash was repeated.

'Well, sir?' questioned the housekeeper.

'Well?' he returned. 'Who is in that room?'

'The master, sir,' she said in awed tones; 'every night, unless there isn't a moon, he goes up there after we're all gone to bed, and I hear them splashes—a hundred and forty-two I've heard to-night. There's no furniture in that room, sir, and he keeps it locked. Sometimes he takes packages up there. Just underneath the window there's a sort of well, or perhaps I should say a little pond, that comes nearly up to the walls of the house, sir; that's where you hears the splash, sir.'

'And what is it that drops, Mrs. Hewitt?'

'Don't ask me, sir, for I don't know; but I can tell you one thing, sir.'

'What is that?'

The woman checked herself.

'You're an old friend of the master's, aren't you, Mr. Forrest?'

'I think I am the most intimate friend he has.'

'Then I'll tell you, sir The master's mad!'

'Mad!' Forrest exclaimed, involuntarily raising his voice. 'But——'

'Hush!' She stopped him.

There was the sound of a door closing and the turning of a key; then feet on the stairs. Arthur Forrest crept out of the room, and, looking over the banisters, was just in time to see Peterson, clothed only in his pyjamas, disappear into his bedroom.

'I tell you he's mad.' Mrs. Hewitt was by his side again.

'But he can't be,' said Forrest, rather annoyed, 'I know him so well; I've never known a truer——'

'He's mad,' repeated Mrs. Hewitt. 'It's in the family. I dare say you know that young Carl died in an asylum?'

. . . . .

The next day Sylviane was obliged to stay in bed; she had a feverish cold, caught the previous night. Forrest and Peterson breakfasted together. The absence of Sims had, of course, been discovered, and Forrest, who had not yet decided on any definite course, contented himself with expressing an indifferent surprise when Peterson told him the news. Curiously enough, Peterson himself did not

seem to be at all disconcerted by this unauthorised departure of his treasured valet.

'He's a dreamy fellow,' he said; 'rather queer—must be a genius. I dare say he's got up early to go fishing, and has forgotten the time.'

'Does he often forget the time?' asked Arthur.

'No, I must say he doesn't; but when a fellow's fishing, you know——'

'Just so,' Arthur agreed. 'By the way, talking of fishing, that's a curious little well or pond you've got up against the back of the house.'

Peterson stopped eating, his eye suddenly blazed, and then he looked away.

'When did you see it?' he inquired, fiercely, almost angrily.

'I was taking my walks abroad this morning,' answered Arthur, with careful nonchalance, 'and I happened to come across it; that's all.'

During the remainder of the meal Peterson never uttered another word. Towards afternoon, as Sims had not returned, Peterson talked of informing the police.

'Wait till to-morrow, old chap,' said Forrest;

'that's my advice. Fifty things may have occurred to keep him away, and Sims isn't the man to let himself come to any serious harm.'

Peterson concurred; and so it happened that Forrest had another day in which to form a plan of action.

Just before dinner there came a telegram addressed to Mrs. Forrest; Forrest opened it. The message was: 'Your mother seriously ill; you had better come to-morrow. Colpus, Hotel Cecil.'

Instantly Arthur Forrest seemed to see a way clear. Sylviane could not go to London; he would go alone, and seize or create an opportunity to come to grips with Colpus. As for the illness, it did not interest him; he admitted to himself he wished Mrs. Colpus might not recover; that would be a tremendous simplification.

That night, half an hour after he had said good night to his host, Forrest crept out through the conservatory to the back of the house. Sticking close to the wall, he went forward till he came to the well. Looking up, he descried the projecting pipe above him; there was a splash at his feet. Almost mechanically he

took off his hat and held it over the open well; presently a light object fell into it. Arthur examined this gift from above—it was a sovereign.

With a sinking heart he crept back again, and even as he went he heard another splash into the well.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LAST

The next morning Peterson drove Arthur Forrest to Crewe station. The millionaire was in the gayest mood, and as Forrest listened to his chatter he could scarcely believe that this was the man who spent the midnight hours in dropping sovereigns down a well from a second-story window. And yet, sometimes, as he looked at him and examined the workings of his face, the terrible words of Mrs. Hewitt, spoken with such firmness and conviction, came back to him with appalling force. There was a looseness, a lack of control in the man's gesture, which might easily be interpreted as the beginning of madness, or, at any rate, of monomania. For himself, Forrest was depressed; he felt as though he was standing on a plank, and the plank was being withdrawn from under his feet—turn which way he would, he could see no sure ground in front of him. He

doubted now whether after all Sims was really disposed of, whether he might not have returned direct to his employers, the Colpuses, and commenced a new series of machinations. Forrest was also uneasy about his wife. She was by no means seriously unwell, but the feverish cold which held her had not improved, and he had left her still in bed. He would have preferred to stay by her side ; but when, without actually showing her the telegram, he had told her that her mother was ill, she had of her own accord suggested that he should go to London.

'If mother is ill she will be very ill,' Sylviane had said. 'I should like you to go.'

'I meant to go,' he had answered.

'Perhaps—perhaps you may—be able to do something,' she had suggested, with a strange, wistful glance.

But what could he do? he reflected ; how should he broach the subject to Dr. Colpus? What logic could he use? What pressure could he bring to bear? Would not the result be that he would merely make himself ridiculous, with no result whatever? If he had one shred —one tittle of evidence—but he had not.

He almost regretted now that he had let Sims go. Would it not have been better to take the bull by the horns, as it were, to have given Sims into custody, and trusted to the efforts of the police to get hold of something tangible?

Peterson woke him up from his reverie. 'You're worrying,' the young man said, 'and it's a fine autumn morning; you're behind a good horse, and you ought to be sublimely ashamed of yourself. I'm sure you needn't get excited about your mother-in-law; these things always seem more serious at a distance. When you get there you're certain to find that it's nothing very extraordinary, this illness of hers. As for your wife, Forrest, rely on me to take care that she is seen after.' Peterson spoke with a sudden access of feeling. 'I shall call for Dr. Spriggs and take him back with me.'

They reached the station. At the book-stall Forrest stopped to buy a paper, but found that he had no small change.

'Can you change me a sovereign?' he said to Peterson, and held out a gold piece. It happened to be the very coin which he had

caught in his hat on the previous night—absolutely new and bright.

Peterson looked at the sovereign intently, and as he did so his face altered. 'No,' he said, as if offended; 'I can't.'

Although the train was an express, its progress to London that morning was noticeably slow—the good genius of the North-Western Railway, the finest railway in the world, seemed to be struggling against some adverse and powerful influence. Forrest chafed under the delays. He was absorbed by the desire to see the Colpuses, to *do* something; he felt that further inactivity was impossible. The train ran into Willesden very late; Arthur noticed that it was nearly twenty minutes to two. A down train, the one-thirty from Euston, was just leaving the station. Forrest gazed absently at the compartments as they slowly filed past him. Then suddenly he started up; he had seen a face—the merest glimpse of a face—in that outgoing train; but he was sure of it, and it was the face of Dr. Colpus. He excitedly inquired from the official who collected the tickets where the down train was bound for. 'Crewe and North Wales,' was the answer.

He wanted to jump out and pursue it; he wanted to fly, to perform miracles of speed.

'What is the next train to Crewe?' he asked.

'Two o'clock from Euston, sir—Scotch express; doesn't stop anywhere, sir. Due in Crewe at 5.15, one minute before the train that's just gone out, sir.'

'Could I catch it at Euston?'

'You might just catch it, sir.'

But there was another long delay at Willesden, and it was one minute to two o'clock when it arrived at Euston. Forrest flung himself out and raced round to the departure platform. The Scotch express was just moving. A porter tried to block his way; but he made a circuit of the man, opened the door of a second-class compartment, which happened to be nearest, and sprang in. He had caught it! He smiled triumphantly. He laughed—it was wellnigh a brutal laugh—the laugh of one who feels that he is to be a conqueror. He was sure—the truth flashed upon him—that Mrs. Colpus's illness was a purely imaginary illness, and that the telegram of the previous evening had been despatched solely

to get him, and Sylviane also, out of the way, while Dr. Colpus performed a mission of his own at Radway Grange. What that mission was he could not guess. It might be a mission of murder, or its object might merely be to see Arthur Peterson and inform him of the true facts of old Peterson's first marriage. In either case Forrest swore to himself that the mission should not be executed. By a fortunate chance he had caught sight of Colpus, and he would take full advantage of his good fortune; he felt almost happy in the immediate prospect of open hostilities—he felt that he was capable of any audacity, any boldness. The one matter that troubled him was the question of Sims. Why was Dr. Colpus thus hurrying the matter? Was it because he had heard from Sims, or was it because he had *not* heard from Sims, and, not hearing, feared an unlooked-for hitch? To these queries he could discover no satisfactory reply.

The express proved itself worthy of its reputation as one of the first 'flyers' in the kingdom. Arthur Forrest happened to have with him a time-table and a map, and he calculated that his own train should overtake the

train which had left Euston half an hour before it, stopping at Willesden, Rugby, and Stafford *en route*, somewhere near Whitmore, a wayside station about halfway between Stafford and Crewe. As soon as the Scotch express with its two engines had thundered through Stafford he began to look out of the window. The suberb quadruple road of the North-Western stretched away in front in large sweeping curves. Almost immediately he saw a wisp of steam through some distant trees, and soon he caught sight of the tail of the North Wales train. He timed the speed by the mile-posts ; they were travelling at the rate of sixty-four miles an hour. Gradually, with infinite slowness, the big Scotch express drew nearer to the much lighter, single-engined train, which was now only a few hundred yards ahead. In four minutes the two trains were practically level, running side by side down the gentle slope into Crewe at something like sixty-five miles an hour. It was a magnificent, a thrilling sight—these two tremendous powers vying with each other in a Titanic contest.* As his

* These express races, if I may so call them, do or did actually occur on the London and North-Western line between Stafford and Crewe.

own train crawled past the glinting, swaying wheels of the other one, Arthur, with a quick movement, drew down the blind and peeped out cautiously from behind it. At length he saw Dr. Colpus, solitary in a first-class carriage. Dr. Colpus seemed to be very busy doing something to a walking-stick—so busy, in fact, that he did not appear to notice the great race which was going on. Suddenly the increased vibration, or something else, attracted his attention, and he looked up and saw the other train. With a swift instinctive movement he dropped the walking-stick. Arthur noticed that the Doctor's face had an air of having been detected in some sin.

The next thing was a sudden jar; the Scotch express had encountered an adverse signal, and Arthur had the mortification of watching the other train slide past him to the front. When the Scotch express drew up alongside the platform at Crewe, the Crewe passengers of the North Wales train had already left it. Arthur hastened to leave the station, but he saw nothing of Dr. Colpus. It was now nearly dark. He took a cab, and told the driver to

drive to Radway at his very best pace; he hoped to overtake the Doctor on the road. Within the last mile of Radway they met a vehicle returning, and just outside the lodge gates Arthur saw a figure in the heavy dusk; he called abruptly to the driver to stop, paid him, and jumped out. The figure stood hesitatingly in the shadow of the lodge wall. Forrest watched his cab depart and then approached the wall. At the sound of footsteps in the slushy road the figure turned quickly round.

'Good evening, Doctor,' said Arthur quietly, summoning all his wits, all his coolness.

'Forrest!' exclaimed the Doctor, obviously taken aback; and then, quietly: 'How are you, my dear fellow?'

'I'm in excellent form, thanks,' said Arthur dryly; 'but what is the meaning of this unexpected visit? You wired us that Mrs. Colpus was seriously ill.'

'Ah! she is better, Arthur; she is better. Er—a wonderful constitution, my wife's; her recuperative powers astound me!'

'Indeed! I am glad she is better; but you haven't told me why you are here. Have you

come to let Sylviane know that her mother is out of danger?'

The Doctor looked up queerly, as though he detected some sarcasm in Forrest's tone.

He twirled his walking-stick—that stick which Arthur had noticed in the train—and then put his arm into Forrest's and drew him into the tree-lined avenue past the lodge.

'My dear fellow, the fact is I have come down on a strange errand—I scarcely like to breathe it, it is so queer; but you will have to know, sooner or later, and you may as well know now. I dare say you have discovered that our old servant Sims has quarrelled with us and taken service with Mr. Peterson.'

'I have noticed it,' said Arthur; 'and I have also noticed something else.'

'What is that?'

'Go on; I will tell you afterwards.'

'Well, Sims wrote to my wife a day or two ago, hoping she'd excuse the liberty, and said he had found out a terrible thing—that Mr. Peterson was mad.'

'Mad?' Forrest was startled in spite of himself.

'Yes, undoubtedly; a monomaniac on the

subject of golden sovereigns. He hides it well; but Sims, as you know, is a smart fellow. Now, a monomaniac, under some conditions, is the most dangerous sort of lunatic. My wife was uneasy about Sylviane and yourself, and she would not rest till I promised to come down here and look into things. Of course I shall have to make some excuse to Mr. Peterson for my presence. Is Sims about?'

'Sims is not exactly about,' said Forrest.

'Why not?'

'Because he has left here; surely he has informed you of his departure?'

'Why should he inform me?' said the Doctor under his breath.

'I made him leave,' said Arthur, determined to bring things to a crisis instantly. 'Dr. Colpus, from the moment my wife saw Sims here she suspected your damnable plot; she told me of her suspicions, and I captured Sims in a room by himself, and gave him the choice between confession and the prison. He chose to give his employers away—that's all.'

Dr. Colpus raised his stick in a peculiar manner, and then dropped it. He tried to

speak, but apparently could not compose any suitable speech.

'And let me tell you something else,' resumed Arthur. 'I know that your telegram was a mere blind; I know that Mrs. Colpus has not been ill, though I was fool enough at first to believe that she was. I went up to London this morning, my dear Doctor, saw you by a happy chance at Willesden, and followed you back to Crewe. I think I can guess your object in coming here: you had not heard satisfactory news from your friend, Mr. Sims; you feared that something had gone wrong, and so you thought you would come down and settle affairs in your own style. One murder more or less, what would that be to you? If Arthur Peterson were out of the way, I should take the Peterson millions then. Why, of course! And then, when I had taken them, how easy to send me after Peterson!'

Forrest, for all his intention to be cool, had lost control of himself in the heat of his anger. He moved closer to the Doctor, and fixed on him a menacing glance. In the darkness each could just distinguish the other's face.

'Are you, too, mad, Arthur?' said the Doctor, gently.

There was a stir in the trees behind them.

'What was that?' exclaimed the Doctor.

'If it is not Sims, it is a rabbit,' Arthur sneered.

'I really can't pretend to make any answer to this marvellous charge of yours,' began the Doctor; 'I can only hope that you are not yourself to-night. I think I will leave you.'

'Before you leave me you might answer one question,' said Arthur.

'Well?' said the Doctor, as though to humour a lunatic.

'How did you kill the late Mr. Drew?'

There was a silence, but Dr. Colpus's breathing could be heard.

'Then Sims has blabbed,' he muttered.

'Have you no answer?'

'It is useless to say anything; I will go.'

'Yes,' said Arthur, 'you will go—but you will go to the police-station.'

'Not at all,' answered the Doctor; 'you must not take me for a fool, my dear Arthur. A man such as I always arranges for accidents, and it appears that an accident has happened.'

'Then you confess?'

'Since you insist. But there will be no police-station, and I will tell you why. To accuse me would be to accuse your wife's mother, Arthur; you couldn't do that. Think of Sylviane's feelings; think of the scandal.' The Doctor smiled.

'If the scandal were fiftyfold what it will be, you shall hang. As for my wife, I am capable of watching over her.'

'Ahem!' said the Doctor. 'By the way, Arthur, satisfy my anxiety on this one point; I beg it as a last favour. Why did you refuse the fortune?'

'I will tell you—I should like to tell you. On her deathbed I promised my mother that I would never attempt to obtain my father's fortune from my half-brother; she was proud, and I am proud. "If your father could forget us," she said, "let him forget us; we will owe nothing to him." And I, too, say, let him forget us. Not for ten times the millions would I stoop to take those millions from the man to whom my father left them.'

'I can scarcely understand such a feeling,' said the Doctor.

'Possibly not.'

'Nevertheless, my curiosity is satisfied.'

'And now I shall send the lodgeman for the police.'

'You will do nothing of the kind,' said Dr. Colpus, 'for I am going to kill you.' The Doctor raised his stick in both hands. 'This is only an air-gun,' he continued; 'but it is a very special air-gun, and it will infallibly kill at four yards. Moreover, it doesn't make a noise. Don't stir, sir. I give you ten seconds in which to pray for your idiot soul. One—two—three——'

There was a crash through the trees, and the Doctor was violently dragged backward, by a suddenly appearing figure, into the ditch which bordered the avenue. Both figures dropped out of sight, and Arthur Forrest could hear the sound of a terrible struggle.

. . . . .

When Forrest and the lodgeman came with a lantern they found the Doctor dead—choked, with Arthur Peterson's hands still clasped like a vice round his throat. As for Peterson, he was dying: he had been shot in the neck. They carried him into the house.

'Forrest,' he murmured, 'we are quits now; I saved your life.'

'Thanks for that; but don't talk, old man.'

'He called me mad, Forrest, and I was, I was. I tried to keep it off, but I couldn't. I felt I must drop a thousand sovereigns every week into that well. I was bound to do it. Bad blood, Forrest. I say, Forrest, shake hands—Good-bye!'

As Arthur Forrest closed the eyes of his dead friend, he thought of a verse from the oldest of the sacred books of the East: '*Let him that inherits riches take heed lest peradventure he enter thereby into the gates of wrath.*'

. . . .

In spite of himself Arthur Forrest became a millionaire. He passed his time in spoiling his wife and in purchasing authentic masterpieces of painting and presenting them to public galleries. His own collection of canvases is the finest private collection in Europe.

Mrs. Cavalossi was last heard of in Buenos Ayres, upon which city the effulgent autumn of her beauty sheds an adorable glow.

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